

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND THE FIFTH MONARCHY WOMEN: ANNA TRAPNEL, SARAH WIGHT, ELIZABETH AVERY, AND MARY CARY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on mystical experience and the writings of Anna Trapnel and other women associated with the Fifth Monarchy movement, Sarah Wight, Mary Cary, and Elizabeth Avery. Female visionary experience is particularly associated with the High to Late Middle Ages, yet there is a recurrence of it in the mid-seventeenth century, exemplified by the Fifth Monarchy women. One of the aims of this thesis is to determine how far the mystical discourse of medieval writers such as Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and St. Bridget, penetrates the writing of women associated with the Fifth Monarchists. To this end it participates in the critical debate surrounding the possibility of a tradition of female prophecy. A general residue of medieval mystical texts in England in the seventeenth century suggests cross-cultural influences, yet the recurrence of medieval aspects of mysticism in the writing of women visionaries has been seen as little more than coincidence. In order to develop the idea that there are more deliberate reasons for this recurrence, I will examine the ideological beliefs of the Fifth Monarchy movement, analysing in particular the ways in which these beliefs were expressed, as well as considering the impact of seventeenth-century editions of medieval mystical texts on the visionary writers of this movement. In pointing to a tradition of women's self-expression through mystical experience, this thesis also offers an analysis of Luce Irigaray's essay 'La Mystérique'. Emphasising the notion, that for women, the body is a signifier of mystical experience, Irigaray provides us with the means to gain a greater understanding of women's visionary writing, while at the same time enabling us to gauge its significance in relation to the systems of social order prevalent during the period in which they wrote. The combination of historical and theoretical analysis is necessary for a full assessment of the implications of a consciousness of a feminised tradition of mysticism for the Fifth Monarchy movement as a whole, exemplified in the work of one of its leaders, John Rogers, but particularly its women members.

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3

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>		4
<i>List of Illustrations</i>		5
Chapter One	Introduction: Approaches to Sectarian Women's Writing	6
Chapter Two	Millenarianism and 'La Mystérique'	20
Chapter Three	Mystical Traditions: The Dissemination of Medieval Mysticism and the Fifth Monarchists	55
Chapter Four	Patterns of Mystical Discourse	88
Chapter Five	Empty Nothing Creatures: Negation and the Fifth Monarchy Women	135
Chapter Six	Writing Defiance: Law, Language and the Fifth Monarchy Women	176
Conclusion		219
Bibliography		223

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ILLUSTRATIONS

1	An illustration from Pepwell's <i>Dietary of Ghostly Helthe</i> (1520), STC 6833.	61
2	Title page from <i>The Passyon of our lorde Jesu Christe wythe the contemplatiōs</i> [1508?], STC 14557.	105
3	Illustration from Winken de Worde's edition of <i>The Book of Margery Kempe: Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplycyon taken out of the boke of Margerie Kempe of lyn</i> (1501), STC 14924.	107

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: APPROACHES TO SECTARIAN WOMEN'S WRITING

This thesis focuses on the visionary writing of the Fifth Monarchy women, Anna Trapnel, Sarah Wight, Mary Cary, and Elizabeth Avery. Female visionary experience is particularly associated with the High to Late Middle Ages, yet there is a recurrence of it in England in the mid-seventeenth century, exemplified by the Fifth Monarchy women whose mystical and prophetic experiences seem to reflect those of medieval women mystics, such as Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and St. Bridget. These women are acknowledged to be among the most influential of writers of the medieval mystical tradition. The "mystical tradition" is a phrase used by many medievalists to suggest the enduring nature of this type of literature, and by definition it is indicative of a body of thought which is continuous¹. Yet the impact of this tradition on sectarian women's writing has not been considered. Despite the fact that there remained a general residue of medieval mystical texts in England in the seventeenth century which might suggest cross-cultural influences, current critical opinion has declared the recurrence coincidental. Diane Watt's recent study of female prophecy from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century points to the long term influences of the mystics St. Bridget and Margery Kempe, but states clearly that it does not "argue for a *single* tradition of female prophecy, or suggest that it is a consistent, transhistorical phenomenon"². Gerda Lerner notes that the influence of Hildegard of Bingen extends into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but affirms that this does not indicate a tradition of female mysticism: "The women of talent existed, they struggled valiantly, they achieved – and they were forgotten. The women coming after them had to start all over again".³ Is the recurrence of mysticism in the mid-seventeenth century coincidental or are there more

deliberate reasons for it? The aims of this thesis centre on identifying a conscious tradition of female mystical expression. By looking again at the evidence, exploring the dissemination of medieval mystical texts in the seventeenth century, and by analysing texts from key figures in the mystical tradition, I will argue that female visionary experience is a consistent and therefore a cross-cultural phenomenon. The visionary writings of the Fifth Monarchy women will consequently be interpreted as part of a specific feminised movement of self-expression.

Critical studies of the Fifth Monarchists have been few, and it is only in recent years that feminist scholars have considered the writings of Anna Trapnel, Mary Cary, and to a lesser extent Sarah Wight and Elizabeth Avery, in terms of seventeenth-century radicalism and female self-expression. Alfred Cohen presented one of the first studies of the Fifth Monarchists in 1964 when he explored the general characteristics of the "Fifth Monarchy mind"⁴ through the pen of Mary Cary. He asserted that "the ideas of the Fifth Monarchy Men" were "best seen from a study of the works of one of the popular writers of the movement, Mary Cary."⁵ Although he does not consider the significance of gender differences, Cohen at least acknowledges the contribution made by Cary to the Fifth Monarchy movement at a time when literary critics generally dismissed much of women's writing in the seventeenth century as inferior to that of their male counterparts.

In her recent study of seventeenth-century women's prophetic texts, Stevie Davis points out that women's contribution to radicalism has been largely ignored. Davis acknowledges that everyone "writing in the field of seventeenth-century radicalism owes a great debt to writerly historians such as Christopher Hill, Keith Thomas, Lawrence Stone, B.S. Capp, E.P. Thompson, [and] Brian Manning"⁶, yet, worthy though their studies are, as a whole they tend to neglect the impact of female prophecy. Recently, Hilary Hinds has aimed to enlighten literary critics who argue that women's sectarian

writing from the mid-seventeenth century is excluded because “they have a limited amount to offer on a 'literary' level”.⁷ As she points out, “critics have been analysing and commentating on the writings of men from the radical sects, making sense of their pronouncements on issues similar to those engaged with by the women writers”⁸. Critics have considered such matters as the origins of spiritual autobiography, the defining characteristics of Puritan writing, and the language of Quakerism, or of the sects more generally. It was not, therefore, that there was no precedent for looking at this work, continues Hinds, or that there was “no body of criticism to engage or enrage the feminist researcher; it was more that there was a lacuna when it came to that body of writing produced by women from the sects.”⁹

In the only full-length study of the Fifth Monarchy movement, Bernard Capp's *The Fifth Monarchy Men*, the bias is towards understanding the ideas of its male leaders. Men such as Thomas Venner and Vavasor Powell who ensured, as Capp points out, that “Fifth Monarchists were linked to the mainstream of political affairs in the years after the execution of Charles I in 1649.”¹⁰ And in *The World Turned Upside Down*, as Davis again points out, Christopher Hill has “all but censored out, unread, women of the calibre of Cary, [and] Trapnel”¹¹, and even by the time he wrote *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* twenty years later these women were still ignored. Nevertheless, Christopher Hill and Keith Thomas have been among those considering the writing of women like Trapnel or Cary in relation to their position as members of a radical sectarian group, and have, as Kate Chedgzoy points out, viewed their utterances within a more general revolutionary framework.¹² Keith Thomas, for instance, explored women's association with the sects in order to assess the extent to which it affected the family unit.¹³ Manifest in these studies, however, is the belief that women did not figure as influential members of their particular group; less obvious is the belief that female prophecy was not especially significant either to the

movement to which the women prophets belonged, or to the women themselves.¹⁴

Before considering the special significance of female prophecy, it is necessary to probe the issue of the literary worth of Fifth Monarchist writing as a whole since the study of the Fifth Monarchists and their literary output is further problematised by their perceived lack of rationality.

Some years ago Murray Tolmie argued for the successful establishment of a rational and serious nonconformity in England in the first half of the seventeenth century. He took issue with historians such as Christopher Hill, A.L. Morton, and Bernard Capp, whom he believed had perpetuated the idea that the emergent Puritan sectaries in general comprised a "lunatic fringe".¹⁵ Capp, for example, had suggested that the lack of historical and critical study of the Fifth Monarchist movement in general "stems from an assumption that they were an irrational movement, beyond the pale of analysis."¹⁶ His study of the Fifth Monarchists concentrates on the rational aspects of the Fifth Monarchist movement, analysing their contribution to politics, and their commitment to social and legal reform, and emphasises how carefully thought out their policies were, and even justified their more aggressive attitude by citing favourable scriptural passages.¹⁷ In so doing he avoids dealing with those assumptions that they were an "irrational movement". Christopher Hill acknowledged his debt to Capp, whom he believed, had enabled scholars to "see millenarianism as a natural and rational product of the assumptions of this society".¹⁸ Hill also points out that due to the "admirable work" of other scholars "alchemy, astrology and natural magic similarly take their place as reasonable subjects for rational men and women to be interested in".¹⁹ He further suggests that if we dismiss certain ideas simply "because they seem irrational to us, we may be depriving ourselves of valuable insights into the society". Hill seems determined to rationalise irrationality, particularly as he includes a warning to historians "to err on the side of looking for rational significance".²⁰ Barry Reay, on the

other hand, accepts their irrationality but points to its negative effects, maintaining that separatism, or nonconformity as a coherent movement, was hampered by an undeveloped political consciousness, comprising at best an "inchoate protest".²¹ So as we investigate the study of sectarian writing we immediately uncover conflict as scholars attempt to explain away irrationality in order to incorporate this body of writing into the mainstream.

But of course much of the writing of Fifth Monarchists does contain 'irrational' elements in that they write or speak of things not known and other worldly. John Rogers, for example, recounts his various experiences of possession by either divine or diabolical forces.²² If irrationality poses problems for male historians looking mainly at male authored texts, the problems associated with irrationality in women's prophetic writing run even deeper. As the historian Phyllis Mack notes, respectable women were constrained by convention to behave with humility and modesty, whereas the female visionary was constrained to behave as though she were literally out of her mind.²³ Irrationality in women's writing therefore becomes synonymous with work unworthy of study. Indeed, Hilary Hinds has drawn attention to the long "feminist silence around seventeenth-century women's writing", and has suggested that the generic forms in which they largely wrote (conversion narratives, spiritual autobiographies, prophecies, and pamphlets) were unfamiliar, therefore deterring even feminist critics²⁴. And, as Mack observes, visionary women's writing has been dismissed as the outpourings of the insane since it was "commonly agreed that women [were] particularly prone to the expression of an ardent, even passionate religiosity".²⁵ Thus, Mary Cary's writing could be simultaneously legitimated and invalidated because she spoke as a prophetess. On one hand, women prophets were seen to be divinely authorised, but on the other hand, they were thought to be naturally predisposed to prophecy because of their tendency to be emotional, irrational, and easily influenced by powerful exterior forces.

The radical sects which burgeoned during the revolutionary decades appear to have offered women the opportunity for a public role and voice which was otherwise denied them; yet paradoxically, this opportunity may have been facilitated by precisely those aspects of the mid-seventeenth-century ideology of femininity which held them back in other areas of life.²⁶ Hilary Hinds clarifies this point of view, when she argues that virtually all sectarian writing by women, whether autobiography, warning or prediction, conformed to the definition of prophetic utterance as not so much the mere prediction of happenings in the future, but visions of the certainty of the overruling of the universe on the part of God²⁷. In other words prophecy was “glossed as the work of God”, with the human author as no more than a medium for its dissemination, since as prophets, they were “uttering God's word verbatim”, as women, “their lowliness, their irrationality and their despised condition made them (in scriptural terms) closer to God, more likely to be chosen by him to speak”²⁸. Thus the relation of authorship to prophecy could function to legitimate and authorise women's public and spiritual activities.²⁹ Elizabeth Avery affirms that she presents her work to the public “because the power of God doth appear in it”, and we hear how Anna Trapnel was “seized upon by the Lord [and] carried forth in a spirit of Prayer and Singing”.³⁰ Though generally assumed to be theologically, morally, medically, and intellectually inferior to men, women were more receptive to the spirit of God. Indeed, Bernard Capp notes that “in the church lists which have survived, women easily outnumbered men”.³¹

This brings us back to the special significance of female prophecy for it is in the association of prophetic experience and irrationality that the significance of visionary experience to the women themselves becomes clear. Sue Wiseman has engaged with the idea of the female prophet's ‘irrationality’. Enlightened by feminist thought, she has pointed out that the borders of the historical field are designated by the words ‘mysticism’, ‘eroticism’, ‘madness’, but rather than seeing this as a repeated movement

of marginalisation in the work of scholars in terms of a reaffirmation of seventeenth-century power structures, Wiseman argues that the margins are a potentially powerful place to be. Of women's prophecy, she writes that it "undercuts literary history, [...] by disclosing a concept of authority which is double, treble, multiple and perpetually shifting, disappearing and negotiating."³² Because women are receptive to the spirit of God they are invested with a concept of authority which is elusive, fluid. Thus, within the rigid structure of mid-seventeenth century society mysticism provides women with the opportunity for self-representation. Self-representation through self-effacement as the spirit of "God" enters the body of the woman prophet seems paradoxical and this will be examined more fully in chapter five. For now I will simply discuss the general concept that the female prophet's body is a site for divine intervention. In the Christian tradition "God" is the ultimate patriarch and it is surely significant that, as the philosopher Luce Irigaray points out, "He has chosen her body to inscribe His will".³³

The merging of "His" divine being with the female body is the subject of Diane Purkiss's essay 'Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body' in which she points out that the woman visionary transgressed gender norms since her body functioned as a "sign for God".³⁴ Women are supposed to be a step removed from God since they are made in the likeness of 'man', whereas man is made in the likeness of God.³⁵ The woman prophet therefore contravenes Christian doctrine which upholds the idea that man represents the truest image of God. But rather than seeing this as a straightforward means of self-empowerment for the woman prophet, Purkiss points out that it is problematised both by the nature of prophecy and by the fact that it is invariably a public occurrence. The body of the female prophet is simultaneously relegated to the status of "a passive conduit" and invested with an "unsettling power" because it is "exposed to the gaze of men other than husband or father".³⁶ Like Wiseman, Purkiss does not see this situation as necessarily negative. Since prophetic utterance involves a radical

dislocation of the voice from the body, Purkiss argues that the discourse of prophecy offered women an opportunity “to represent their own anomalous position in relation to language”.³⁷ Rather than being entirely effaced by divine agency, prophecy leaves a space for the female speaking voice.³⁸

Purkiss and Wiseman are not alone in pointing to the possibilities for women’s self-expression through prophetic experience. Those who have worked in this field are generally united in a common aim to show how, in the words of Hinds, sectarian women refused “the traditional constraints of gender [and] insisted upon their right, indeed their duty, to be heard.”³⁹ Yet there are important subdivisions of feminist thought as it applies to seventeenth-century women’s writing. Elaine Hobby, for example, has argued that women prophets can be seen as “proto-feminists”, because they actively and deliberately used the discourse of prophecy and the identity/social role of prophet to “transcend the bonds of true feminine self-effacement, using the ideas and structures of contemporary thought to negotiate some space and autonomy”.⁴⁰ Hilda Smith, on the other hand, denies that the prophets were concerned with ‘feminist issues’ such as family structure and the uses of male power, and believes that they did not assert a political identity as women, and so were less feminist than the royalist women who, despite their religious and political conservatism, did seek to challenge patriarchal structures⁴¹. Whether or not we see female prophets as ‘proto-feminists’, debates such as this are fruitful for drawing attention to the significance of sectarian women’s writing to feminist literary studies. Indeed, Hilary Hinds has noted its importance as a “challenge to the limits not only of the literary canon in all its pomp and solemnity, but also to those of feminist scholarship, which has tended to set the starting point of women’s writing in the eighteenth century.”⁴²

Diane Purkiss has explored the frequently contradictory nature of women’s writing in order to assess the challenge to feminist reading practices which writing by

non-aristocratic women in the seventeenth century presents.⁴³ In her study, 'Material Girls', she refers to Joseph Swetnam's notorious tract, *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Woman* (1615), as an example of a text which participates in a festive process. That is, as author, Swetnam figures himself as "a showman" who "both displays pleasures for his audience and joins them in seeking entertainment"⁴⁴. Since women were commodities, signifying and spending money but not able to produce it, he ridicules women by referring specifically to monetary value. Purkiss supplements her discussion by referring in general to Luce Irigaray's writing, and it is her use of Irigaray which is of particular interest to us. She states that Irigaray's writing suggests that "the structural basis" for Swetnam's argument "is perhaps the exchange of women themselves as commodities through marriage".⁴⁵ For in this way women can be made to seem productive or economically viable. This situation perpetuates the objectification and oppression of women. The glaring misogyny of Swetnam's text did not go unprotested, and it is with the pamphlets which challenge his views that Purkiss is chiefly concerned. Despite the fact that many of these responses were published pseudonymously they display a feminine self-consciousness about gender which Purkiss emphasises by returning to Irigaray. She argues that the authors of these pamphlets are "acting women, staging disorderly femininity in a manner which refuses the elision of the symbolic and personal realms sought by modern critics."⁴⁶ In other words, their structure and style are unfamiliar to modern feminism and cannot therefore be easily categorised as feminist. Purkiss continues that such stagings suggest "a highly unstable enactment of the signifiers of femininity that could perhaps be likened to Irigarayan mimicry, that mimicry in which femininity is seen to become not natural or biological but theatrical."⁴⁷ Here Purkiss is alluding to Irigaray's essay 'La Mystérique', but she leaves the analysis there.

We can take the analysis of mimicry a step further by looking at *This Sex Which*

Is Not One. Here Irigaray argues that mimicry is a “path” which has “historically been assigned to the feminine”⁴⁸. This means, as Purkiss suggests, that one must assume the feminine role deliberately. In the theatrical performance of their feminine role, women are enabled to convert “a form of subordination into an affirmation”⁴⁹. Thus the conscious enactment of the feminine becomes a means of thwarting the power structures which, Irigaray argues, maintain sexual indifference. But any direct feminine challenge to the power structure “means demanding to speak as a (masculine) ‘subject,’ ” so also maintaining sexual indifference.⁵⁰ The idea of mimicry is therefore significant in drawing attention to the difficulties women face in their attempts to achieve subjectivity and create a space for themselves from which to speak publicly. Elsewhere, Purkiss’s work on female visionaries seems to carry an Irigarayan subtext though this is never made explicit⁵¹. In her essay “Engendering Penitence” Suzanne Trill, on the other hand, has made the significance of Irigarayan philosophy to women’s devotional writing clearer. Trill points out that it is the woman’s identification with Christ, whom Irigaray refers to in ‘*La Mystérique*’ as “[t]hat most female of men”, which enables the woman mystic to represent her lack of subjectivity.⁵²

This study is allied with those of Davis, Wiseman, Purkiss and others, in exploring the gendered motifs associated with female prophecy and mysticism, in addition to which I will put forward an analysis of Irigaray’s philosophical views on the importance of mystical experience for women’s selfhood. This thesis therefore merges two seemingly disparate elements: the unearthly experiences of visionary women with cultural, social and political concerns. Feminist critics have been mainly engaged in exploring how women prophets managed to publish their words and how they contributed to the politics of their time. While this study does consider these key issues, it also aims to demonstrate the importance and political potential of mysticism both to the Fifth Monarchist movement and, ultimately, to the women themselves.

In so far as this thesis focuses on mystical discourse and women's position in relation to language, a critical consideration of Irigaray's 'La Mystérique' will provide invaluable insight into gendered mystical motifs, such as illness and other signs of physical corruption, as well as into the notion of the woman visionary as an empty nothing creature. However, in so far as this thesis focuses on the women associated with the Fifth Monarchists, it addresses the historical conditions which contributed to the political content in the writings of Anna Trapnel, Sarah Wight, Mary Cary and Elizabeth Avery.⁵³ These seemingly disparate elements will be united to explore the political potentiality of mysticism and the Fifth Monarchy women's use of language as a means of self-empowerment. Therefore, before we come to a more detailed analysis of Irigaray in the following chapter, it is necessary to place the writing of the Fifth Monarchy women in its historical context.

NOTES

- 1 The most notable propounder of the mystical tradition in England is Marian Glasscoe who edited a series of studies entitled *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*. Other examples include Marion Norman, 'Gertrude More and the English Mystical Tradition' in *Recusant History* 13 (1975-6), pp.196-211, and David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (London: Burns & Oates, 1961).
- 2 Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), pp.3, 158.
- 3 Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of a Feminist Consciousness from the Middle Ages to 1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.57, 275.
- 4 Alfred Cohen, 'The Fifth Monarchy Mind: Mary Cary and the Origins of Totalitarianism' in *Social Research* 31 (1964), pp.195-213.
- 5 Ibid., p.199.
- 6 Stevie Davis, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution 1640-1660* (London: The Women's Press, 1998), p.xi.
- 7 Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.3.
- 8 Ibid., p.53.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p.14.
- 11 See Davis, *Unbridled Spirits*, pp.7-8.
- 12 Kate Chedgzoy, 'Female Prophecy in the Seventeenth Century: the Instance of Anna Trapnel' in William Zunder and Suzanne Trill (eds.), *Writing and the English Renaissance* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), pp.238-54, p.251.
- 13 Keith Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects' in *Past and Present* 13 (1958), pp.42-62.
- 14 See Chedgzoy, 'Female Prophecy', p.251.
- 15 See Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp.ix-x.
- 16 Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, p.16.
- 17 Ibid., p.131. See also chapters 5, 6, and 7.

- 18 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1972), p.13.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid., p.14.
- 21 See Reay's introduction in J.F. McGregor and B. Reay (eds.), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, rpt. 1988), pp.1-21.
- 22 John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh* (1653) Wing R1813, see 'Experience of John Rogers', pp.419-39.
- 23 Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, LA & Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p.106.
- 24 See Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, pp.2-3.
- 25 See Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp.87-8.
- 26 Kate Chedgzoy, 'Female Prophecy', p.249. See also Charlotte F. Otten (ed.), *English Women's Voices 1540-1700* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1992), pp.1-6, Otten summarises theoretical barriers against women writers.
- 27 Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, p.10.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Elizabeth Avery, *Scripture Prophecies Opened ... In Several Letters Written to Christian Friends* (1647) Wing A4272, p.i, Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (1653) Wing T2031, TT E730 (3), p.1.
- 31 Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, p.82.
- 32 Sue Wiseman, 'Unsilent Instruments and the Devil's Cushions: Authority in Seventeenth-Century Women's Prophetic Discourse' in Isobel Armstrong (ed.), *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.176-96, p.194.
- 33 Luce Irigaray, 'La Mystérique' in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, rpt.1994), pp.191-202.
- 34 See Diane Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body': Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century' in Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds.), *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1992), pp.139-58.

- 35 Ibid., p.141.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid., p.142.
- 38 Again, this is an issue which will be developed in chapters three, five and six which examine women's visionary experience in terms of mystical discourse, the idea of the female body as God's vessel, and godly power.
- 39 Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, p.1.
- 40 Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity* (London: Virago, 1988), p.27.
- 41 See Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).
- 42 Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, p.3.
- 43 See Diane Purkiss, 'Material Girls: The Seventeenth-Century Woman Debate' in Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (eds.), *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.69-101.
- 44 Ibid., p.75.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid., p.85.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, rpt. 1993), p.76.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 See Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice', pp.139-58.
- 52 See Suzanne Trill, 'Engendering Penitence: Nicholas Breton and "the Countesse of Penbrooke"' in Kate Chedgzoy, Melanie Hansen and Suzanne Trill (eds.), *Voicing Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern Writing* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996), pp.25-44, 39-40, Luce Irigaray, 'La Mystérique' in *Speculum*, p.199.
- 53 For a more detailed discussion of the issues pertinent to this dual approach to sectarian women's writing see this thesis, chapter four, pp.89-92 and pp.112-113.

CHAPTER TWO

MILLENARIANISM AND 'LA MYSTÉRIQUE'

The position of the women writers associated with the Fifth Monarchists was an enigmatical one. It will become clear as we progress through this thesis that they simultaneously affirmed and denied authorship, manipulated the relationship between presence and absence, and asserted their independence of spirit yet subordinated themselves to men. How, then, are we to understand and interpret the role of the Fifth Monarchy women? The answer seems to lie in a dual approach which would engage with historical specificity while allowing for an exploration of the significance of their writing, its content, its style and the implications of publication, for the women themselves. The two terms which describe this chapter, 'millenarianism', the concept most closely associated with the Fifth Monarchists, and 'La Mystérique', coined by Luce Irigaray to denote a certain state of consciousness, may seem oppositional in that one has historical reality whereas the other has none. However, an examination of Irigaray's mystical philosophy and a historicised analysis of the millenarian movement, the Fifth Monarchists, is, as I aim to prove in the ensuing chapter, productive in enabling us to gain new insight into the role of women in a political movement in seventeenth-century England.

Irigaray is known as a psychoanalyst as well as a philosopher, and, despite the fact that this thesis juxtaposes Irigarayan theory and the writing of the Fifth Monarchy women, there is a precedent for adopting an approach that might be expected to expose a tension between two apparently different fields. Some years ago the influential theorist Michel de Certeau took this approach, suggesting that such a dual practice is authorised on the basis that there are parallels between the historical

functioning of psychoanalysis and mysticism.¹ He notes, for example, that the separate traditions of psychoanalysis and mysticism acknowledge that “the body, far from being ruled by discourse, is itself a symbolic language” (*Mystic Fable*, p.8), as well as pointing to the association between the two terms, ‘mystical’ and ‘unconscious’ (*Mystic Fable*, p.8). As the unconscious is the deepest, most inaccessible level of the psyche it shares with the ‘mystical’ the sense of something mysterious which exists beyond the ability of language to describe it. Since psychoanalysis and mysticism are of the same essential nature we are justified in making comparisons between them, thus raising the issue of historicity.

As de Certeau goes on to note, the interest analysts have taken in mystical texts “falls within a long psychiatric tradition” (*Mystic Fable*, p.8), making possible theoretical strategems appropriate to a certain body of work which exists in the past. Moreover, extant mystical texts do, as again de Certeau points out, “constitute a specific *historical* reality” (*Mystic Fable*, p.9), belonging as they do to a defined historical period. In their writing the mystics themselves record such historical particularities as meetings with their contemporaries, or carrying out minor daily tasks, thus leading us back to the specific even as they engage with the mysterious. In this way, as de Certeau writes, mystical texts are “amenable to an analysis that sets them within a multiplicity of correlations among economic, social, cultural [or] epistemological, and other data” (*Mystic Fable*, p.9). To establish the relation between social, cultural, political data and the desire for ultimate knowledge and its communication in mystical texts is, as he says, to “preserve the difference of the past [...] from generalizations” (*Mystic Fable*, p.9) so that theoretical procedure is not simply ‘applied’.

Irigaray’s interest in mysticism has provided us with a concept that helps us to understand the past mystical experiences of women writers from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century. Mysticism is customarily understood to be a spiritual journey

towards 'God', but an evaluation of Irigaray's mystical philosophy enables us to clarify the significance of a politico-religious phenomenon that is understood and experienced in feminine terms. Indeed, awareness of Irigarayan theoretical procedure facilitates the study of a past from which emerged the Fifth Monarchy women writers by, as de Certeau puts it, "bringing into play what the language of mystics had already articulated" (*Mystic Fable*, p.9) and enlarging upon its effects to redefine both the experience of mysticism and the communication of that experience in purely feminine terms.

Before I turn to a detailed analysis of Irigaray's mystical philosophy in which she probes the possibilities of feminine self-expression, using, as we shall see, the gendered motifs of medieval mysticism as her focus, it is necessary to clarify the singularity of Fifth Monarchist ideology especially in terms of visionary experience. By examining the historical conditions which saw the emergence of the Fifth Monarchists, I aim to reveal both the political relevance of mystical experience and its relevance to our understanding of female experience, particularly in the seventeenth century.

Millenarianism and The Fifth Monarchists

As millenarians predicting the second coming of Christ and the formation of a New Jerusalem in England, the Fifth Monarchists are usually associated with political prophecy rather than mysticism. Mysticism is traditionally a mode of religious thought expressly concerned with seeking and attaining direct, personal communion with God in elevated religious feeling or ecstasy, whereas prophecy is usually understood as prediction. However, in the seventeenth century prophecy also denoted divine inspiration and the reading and interpretation of the Scriptures. Prophecies therefore took the form of prose, prayers, hymns, verse, spiritual autobiography and mystical revelations. The definitions of mysticism and prophecy were less distinctive in the seventeenth century than they are today, and there has been a general

acknowledgement of a mystical element in the work of the Fifth Monarchists. Phyllis Mack, for example, recognises the mystical content in Anna Trapnel's work but states that the "writings" of "women visionaries both before and after the English Revolution [...] were chiefly apolitical or mystical"², thus equating mystical writing with work that has little political relevance. This view is not shared by Michel de Certeau who has shown how political religion takes hold in seventeenth-century Europe, and whose work on mysticism has pointed to the political relevance of "mystic speech".³

"Mystic speech", or the "communications from God or those established among the saints", in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is understood as a response to the breaking down of the Christian tradition which had left mystics with a sense that there was "everywhere a void to be filled" (*Heterologies*, p.88). Michel de Certeau's perspective on mysticism is centred on an understanding of mystical speech in terms of the socio-political instabilities of the various ages which produced it. He sees in it, particularly the mysticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a unified and "universal project" in which mystical "writings were produced from" the sense of "lack" felt after the collapse of the Christian Tradition (*Heterologies*, p.88). His approach has at its root the mystics' critique of the European Catholic church but his views are helpful in enabling us to recognise that there is a political aspect to mysticism in seventeenth-century Protestant England. Though I will move away from his Marxist-influenced theories of mysticism to focus on a more feminist perspective, his notion that mysticism is a reaction to socio-political change is helpful to our understanding of the role of women mystics who involved themselves in contemporary politics. To uncover the meaning of "mystic speech" with regard to the Fifth Monarchist women we need to locate mysticism within the period of English radicalism, considering the origins of sectarianism as well as the very specific differences between the various sectarian groups.

Four years after the execution of Charles I a Fifth Monarchist by the name of William Aspinwall (fl.1653) wrote that “the death of *Charles Stuart*, and the destruction of all Images and karkasses of royalty”⁴ signalled the advent of a new world order, the Fifth Monarchy. Along with the destruction of the king, the social framework was also destroyed. Monarchy, the House of Lords, and the Church of England were abolished. Gone was the principle that everyone ought to be members of a single national church, and gone too were the very institutions upon which the belief in a universal natural order was founded. It is therefore understandable that millenarianism was the founding doctrine of the Fifth Monarchy movement. Led by John Rogers (1627-c.1665), Christopher Feake (fl. 1645), and Vavasor Powell (1617-1670), the Fifth Monarchists based their millenarian beliefs on a new interpretation of the Biblical passages in Daniel and Revelation. They understood the vision of Daniel in terms of evidence which proved that the Fifth Monarchy was “a thing to be expected in the world” (*Brief Description*, p.1). Daniel’s vision consisted of four beasts, which were “interpreted to be four Kings or Kingdomes, [...] and all of them arising out of the earth, or modelled & moulded by humane prudence” (*Brief Description*, p.1). The last of these beasts or monarchies, which was understood to represent Rome, had ten horns, “or Kings that shall arise out of this Monarchy” (*Brief Description*, p.1). The last of these horns or kings “is differenced from the rest of the horns, by the extent of his sovereignty over 3 Kingdoms, [...] and by his fierce and arrogant persecution of the Saints” (*Brief Description*, p.1). This little horn destroyed several of the ten horns and was “Charles, late King, or absolute sovereign of 3 Kingdoms, a fierce & arrogant Tyrant and persecutor of Saints, whose dominion continued till [the] High Court of Justice [...] slew the Beast, and utterly overthrew his dominion” (*Brief Description*, p.1). This was “the doom of the little horn” and it was, believed the Fifth Monarchists, “fulfilled to a jot”.⁵ After the destruction of the last beast the kingdom was to be given to the saints forever,

and this kingdom was to be called the Fifth Monarchy. Thus the Fifth Monarchists, or Saints, believed in the imminent arrival of King Jesus, who was to be “the Monarch or absolute King of this Kingdome and Sovereigne” as it was written in Revelation.⁶

Of the many groups of radical Puritans to emerge during the 1640s and 1650s, the Fifth Monarchists are especially noted for the singularity of their beliefs and convictions, although their millenarianism was not actually one of the factors which distinguished them from their contemporaries. In fact millenarianism was a widespread concept at this time. The emergence of a cohesive Fifth Monarchist group has been dated to the end of 1651, although, as it has been noted, the millenarian beliefs which gave them their name were present in seventy per cent of the works published by Puritan divines between 1640 and 1653 and a lower-class millenarian movement was in existence by 1649.⁷ Generally, Puritans in early modern England shared millenarian beliefs in a coming golden age, corresponding to the thousand years after the second coming of Christ. Joseph Mede (1586-1638), known as the dean of English Millenarianism, discovered the key to the Apocalypse in a system of synchronisms of the events forecast in Daniel and Revelation, and in a way of identifying present events with the prophetic scenario.⁸ The Fifth Monarchists, therefore, seem simply to have been the most prominent millenarian group in England at this time.

If their commitment to millenarianism does not render the Fifth Monarchists unique, what does? Bernard Capp has suggested that of all the radical sectarian groups the Fifth Monarchists were alone “in claiming the right and indeed the duty of taking arms to overthrow existing regimes and establish the millennium”.⁹ Thus, argues Capp, to contemporary sectarians the Fifth Monarchists “appeared as violent revolutionaries, hiding behind a facade of saintliness”.¹⁰ Along with their predisposition towards the use of violence, they were also powerful. Alfred Cohen notes that they were “close enough to the centre of power to convince Cromwell that the time for the

saints to pave the way for Christ's coming was at hand"¹¹, and Kate Chedgzoy points out that Cromwell famously united prophecy with radicalism in his inaugural speech, and signalled the triumph of the millenarian groups by drawing heavily on biblical prophecies.¹² The Fifth Monarchists consolidated their power by having an imposing presence in the Army in 1653, when they collaborated in the dismissal of the Rump of the Long Parliament and its replacement by the Barebones Parliament. In July 1653, Cromwell bypassed the electoral process and gathered together, under the name of the Barebones Parliament, an assembly of men chosen for their religious and moral credentials, including a dozen Fifth Monarchists and many other radicals. But the political power that they wielded in 1653 still does not explain the singularity of their ideology, it simply shows that it was effective. In order to establish the singularity of their views it is necessary to consider briefly the separate histories of some of their contemporary revolutionaries.

The first wave of radicalism occurred during the 1640s with the formation of two groups whose names, like that of the Fifth Monarchists, defined them: the Levellers and the Diggers. These groups believed that the overthrow of a king signalled the end of private property and a return to a world in which the earth itself replaced the treasury to become a valued resource which would be shared in equal measure. Led by John Lilburne (c.1614-57), Richard Overton (c.1631-64), and William Walwyn (1600-80), the Levellers sought to reclaim their natural rights by overthrowing the tyrannous rule of the monarchy and the House of Lords, and establishing a more just political order for the future. A declaration of the Levellers was delivered in a speech to the Lord General Fairfax by "Mr Everard, a late Member of the Army".¹³ This was published in April 1649 as the *True Levellers Standard Advanced*, and in it Mr. Everard argues that ever since the "coming of *William the Conquerour*", the "people of God have lived under tyranny and oppression" (*Levellers Standard*, p.2). But, he continues, "now the time of

deliverance was at hand, and God would bring his people out of slavery, and restore them their freedoms in the enjoying the fruits and benefits of the Earth" (*Levellers Standard*, p.2). The Levellers anticipated a time close "at hand" when "all men should willingly come in, and give up their Lands and Estates", submitting themselves to a communal life, where "those which shall come in and work, [...] shall have meat, drink, and clothes, which is all that is necessary for the life of man" (*Levellers Standard*, p.3). The Leveller movement was supported by 'agitators' in the parliamentary army between 1647-9. Following the defeat of the Levellers at Burford in May 1649, Lilburne was arrested. His trials of 1649 and 1653 are famous, and over half of the one hundred tracts listed in the Thomason collection under his name concern these trials and his subsequent imprisonment. At the first trial for sedition he found ingenious objections to virtually every element of its procedure and was acquitted. At the second, after returning without leave from a sentence of banishment, he centred his defence on the claim that the prosecution had not proved he was the same Lilburne who had been banished. He was again acquitted but imprisoned and then shipped to Jersey. One of the leaders of the Fifth Monarchists, Christopher Feake, wrote that Lilburne had been among those "pillored, stigmatized, scourged, imprisoned, banished, reproached, and otherwise oppressed, contrary unto the righteous Laws of God, and of the Land", and that his release was acclaimed by "the best people in the Land".¹⁴

The Diggers held similar beliefs to the Levellers, preaching and practising agrarian communism. The Diggers were led by Gerrard Winstanley (1609-72), whose visions had inspired the movement. In 1649 he wrote of his founding belief that "every one that intends to live in peace, set themselves with dilligent labour to Till, Digge, and Plow, the Common and barren Land, to get their bread with righteous moderat working, among a moderat minded people, this prevents the evill of Idleness".¹⁵ From April 1649 they established the Digger community at St. George's Hill, Surrey, but were quickly

called to Whitehall to provide an "account of their proceedings in digging up the grounds on *St. Georges Hill*" (*Levellers Standard*, p.2). The establishment of this community was followed by colonies in nine other southern and Midland counties, but the movement was eventually suppressed, and its communities dispersed by local landowners.

The second wave of radicalism saw the appearance of the phenomenon that was the Ranters, the Fifth Monarchists and the Quakers of the 1650s. Barry Reay has described this second wave of radicalism as "a retreat into mysticism and sectarianism".¹⁶ According to Reay, these three groups are gathered together under the blanket of mysticism, clearly pointing out that the mysticism and sectarianism of the Fifth Monarchy movement is a "retreat" from the more militant approach of the earlier revolutionaries. Reay's view of the Fifth Monarchists therefore goes against the widely held belief expressed by Capp and others that they were militant and organised, holding a position of influence in the political institutions of London and a rapidly increasing influence in the middle ranks of the New Model Army. Reay goes on to explain that the "Revolution, which man has been unable to complete, must and will be completed by a miracle [...] The angels may enter where men may not venture to tread; and what political activity had failed to achieve, Divine intervention would surely effect."¹⁷ Once again mysticism is allied with the apolitical.

There has been much debate about the actual existence of the Ranters. Again, the name is definitive, but unlike the terms 'Digger', 'Quaker', or 'Fifth Monarchist', 'Ranter' was a term of abuse. Indeed the historical debate questioning the existence of the Ranters as a clearly defined, self conscious group arises in the first instance from its name. As J.C. Davis points out, there "is a tension between the word 'Ranter', as revelatory of the perceptions of seventeenth-century commentators, and the thing Ranter,"¹⁸ as perceived by modern-day historians. If not on any other level the Ranters

existed in terms of the public sensation arising from the dramatic accounts of Ranterism in the early 1650s.¹⁹ These accounts focus on charges of antinomianism and pantheism, since the Ranters were assumed to dismiss the distinction between good and evil, and to deny the obligatoriness of moral law by arguing that it was God's will for them to curse, swear and be filthy.²⁰ However, one of the most distinguished Ranters, Abiezer Coppe (1619-1672), attempted to disassociate himself from these beliefs.

Since the Quakers also emphasised the pantheistic principle, the indwelling of divinity, they were closely associated with the Ranters. Both the Ranters and the Quakers rejected the literal truth of the Bible, and read it instead, as Nigel Smith has pointed out, as an "allegory of the internal state of each individual".²¹ Also, though "most Quakers were soberly self-denying, the direct claim for unity with God through the inner light, the consequent release from sin, and the implicit rejection of predestinarian theology led some Quakers, like James Nayler and John Perrot, to claim a spiritual perfection which was reminiscent of those called Ranters".²² Indeed J.C. Davis points out that the Quakers and the Ranters were understood to be "virtually identical, except that the former practised an austere morality, the latter 'all abominable filthiness of life' ".²³

The Fifth Monarchists most obviously differed from both the Levellers and the Diggers in that they sought to recreate the social order according to one's moral and spiritual worth, rather than according to the principles of a communal practice. And they most obviously differed from the Ranters and the Quakers in that they were millennialists who emphasised God's historical role and the immanence of a second coming, rather than pantheism.²⁴ The singularity of their beliefs seems to lie therefore in the politicisation of visionary learning.

Since no exact dates for the Apocalypse are given in the Bible, Fifth

Monarchists depended upon prophecy for their biblical interpretation of current events. John Rogers, Christopher Feake, William Aspinwall, Mary Cary and Anna Trapnel were adept at using this form of prophecy for political purposes, recalling and recounting apocalyptic prophecies to support their belief that the new millennium was at hand. However, prophecy as the interpretation of Scripture was in turn dependent upon mystical revelation. This “*precious cause of Christ*”, wrote Christopher Feake, “must be apprehended to be *esteemed* and *received* among THOSE ONLY who are one Spirit with the Lord Jesus Christ in this day, having the *Spirit & principle* of it in the *power of God, and not of man*”.²⁵ Only those to whom God reveals himself are deemed able to understand the Fifth Monarchist cause. John Rogers published a series of godly revelations experienced by ‘saints’ in his 1653 text, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh*, in order to demonstrate that the “*Hidden Mystery of whole Christ*” is made manifest in the “*Head, Neck, and Body*”²⁶ of the Fifth Monarchists. As early as 1647 Elizabeth Avery published *Scripture-Prophecies Opened* because, as she claimed, “the power of God doth appear in it”.²⁷ Again in 1647 Mary Cary wrote that prophecy is a discourse of divinity which “is spoken to all Saints” , and she points out, furthermore, that this discourse is one which is accessible to both genders. “The Lord hath promised”, she writes, “in the latter dayes, to power out his spirit more abundantly upon all flesh, & your sons and your daughters shall prophesie”.²⁸

By the time the Fifth Monarchists became a cohesive group Cary’s emphasis on the importance of “dreams [and] visions”²⁹ and on the importance of female prophecy as well as male prophecy was firmly established in its ideology. Other women also contributed to this. Both Sarah Wight and Anna Trapnel became renowned for their mystical revelations. Sarah Wight’s experience was recorded by the Baptist minister Henry Jessey (d.1663) and first published in 1647 as *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced By the Spirit of Grace, in an Empty Nothing Creature, viz. M^{rs} Sarah Wight*.

This and the subsequent editions, of which there were seven between 1647 and 1658, were used to strengthen the claims of Fifth Monarchists that God's "edifying love may so abound among all Saints, [...] the God of Heaven setting up his *kingdome*, (that *fifth Monarchy*,) *that shall stand for ever*".³⁰ Anna Trapnel first came to public attention in 1654 when, waiting at Whitehall with fellow Fifth Monarchists in support of Vavasour Powell, she fell into a trance lasting twelve days. The result of her mystical revelations during this trance were considered so crucial to the Fifth Monarchists that four publications followed in the same year.³¹

In reality, of course, the Fifth Monarchist belief in the truth of mystical revelation did not secure them a longstanding position of governmental power. As Chedgzoy has noted, the Barebones Parliament was divided on almost every issue, and Cromwell's commitment to the millenarian view was stronger in rhetoric than reality.³² In December 1653 the Barebones parliament was dissolved, leaving Cromwell to rule directly as Protector. The Fifth Monarchists were consequently marginalised as a party of opposition. They staged failed uprisings in 1657 and 1661 under the leadership of Thomas Venner, after which Venner was executed and the movement was severely repressed.

Overall, an assessment of the second wave of radicalism suggests that the Fifth Monarchists were unique in several ways. Though the founding philosophies of the Quakers and the Fifth Monarchists shared some similarities, and though the expression of the Ranters and the early Quakers suggests the mysticism of the Fifth Monarchists, the differences lie in the intensity of the Fifth Monarchist's visions, and their response to these, in their politicisation of mysticism, and in the use made of female experience.

In order to understand fully the issues which arise from this, such as the manipulation of women's visionary learning versus women's autonomy and the relevance of the intensity of women's mysticism and authorisation for women in

subsequent chapters, we have to move beyond a purely historical analysis. It is essential to gauge the special significance of mystical experience for the women themselves as a means of understanding the place of women within the Fifth Monarchy movement. In order to achieve this aim it is helpful to consider Luce Irigaray's theoretical essay on mysticism, 'La Mystérique', since it provides invaluable insight into the gendered motifs which characterise the mysticism of the Fifth Monarchy women, facilitating an exploration of their mystical writing in terms of its contemporary socio-political impact, and as part of a broader feminised form of communication.

'La Mystérique'

There has been a degree of caution on the part of critics to engage with Irigarayan theory. Emphasising the historicity of female prophecy from the Late Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, Diane Watt, for example, incorporates a rather dismissive note to Irigaray's 'La Mystérique', as she writes that one "should be wary of insisting either that women's use of language is distinctly different from that of men or that sex prevails over other factors of difference such as race, social and economic status".³³ Though her allusion to Irigaray suggests that the connections between gender, language and religious experience are significant, Watt does not want to see women's texts in only gendered terms which would, in her opinion, "artificially" isolate them from male discourse.³⁴

As Margaret Whitford points out, Irigaray has been criticised for assuming an unproblematic connection between women's bodies and women's true selves; for celebrating the pre-oedipal bond between mother and daughter, "attempting the impossible return to a pre-patriarchal space before language"; and for "writing the body".³⁵ Irigaray's concern has chiefly focused on the question of identity and language in which the only possible subject position is masculine, and her work addresses the

"need" for both "men and women to have equal subjective rights - equal obviously meaning different but of equal value, subjective implying equivalent rights in exchanges systems".³⁶ Within the systems described by Freud and Lacan the only feminine identity available to women is defective in that it is that of the castrated male.

Freud's well known descriptions of the development of sexual identity, outlined in texts such as *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, suggests that infants are concerned with the polarities of 'phallic' and 'castrated'. The discovery of the anatomical distinction between the sexes (presence or absence of the penis) gives rise to penis envy in girls and castration anxiety in boys. In Freud's castration scenario it is the little boy who looks and is horrified that the little girl, the woman, has nothing to see. She shows nothing that is penis-shaped or could substitute for a penis. The little girl then looks and merely confirms what the boy is supposed to have seen, or rather, not seen. The castration complex is centred on the fantasy that the girl's (and also the mother's) penis has been cut off. In boys the castration complex arises after they have learnt from the sight of the female genitals that the organ they value so highly need not necessarily accompany the body.

Lacan transposes the Freudian castration complex from the distinctions of gender onto the symbolic realm. Jane Gallop notes that Lacan's contribution to Freud's theory of sexual difference is to articulate the castration complex around the phallus so that in his scheme the "phallus, unlike the penis, is lacking to any subject, male or female".³⁷ For Lacan, the entry into language corresponds with the loss of wholeness at the moment when the infant recognises it has an identity separate from its mother's. This recognition catapults the infant into the symbolic realm of discourse in order to fulfil its desire to re-establish a relationship with an Other. The phallus must be lacking for any subject to enter language thus both sexes enter the symbolic realm by the same mechanism of castration. But, as Cornell and Thurschwell note, while "this peculiar

notion of castration would appear to apply equally to both sexes, Lacan goes further and appropriates signification in general to the masculine. The penis becomes identified with the phallus, the 'transcendental signifier' ".³⁸ Since "woman" lacks a penis her position with regard to the symbolic realm is one of exclusion. Lacan wrote that there "is no woman, but excluded from the value of words"³⁹, meaning that in the symbolic realm "the feminine is the excluded Other of masculine discourse".⁴⁰ Theorists, such as Kristeva and Irigaray, have noted the truth of this claim and their work engages clearly with the fact, as they see it, that actual women have been excluded from the realm of discourse. Indeed, both Irigaray and Kristeva work from the premise that actual women have been excluded from the realm of discourse to show the extent to which "woman" does not even belong to the order of being.

Many theorists, both feminist and non-feminist, have equated negativity with the feminine so that in the field of psychoanalytic and linguistic theory a general consensus has been reached wherein "woman" is that which cannot be represented. Therefore, what is sought is the evolution of speaking as, for, and about, "woman" in a way that would undermine the logic of the Lacanian psychoanalytic and linguistic theory that denies difference in the name of the same. Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* consists of a collection of essays in which she analyses the work of, among others, Plato, Freud and Lacan. She found that they all tell "the story of the same", and on the basis of her readings it becomes evident that "woman" has no identity of her own, her sexual difference functions only to generate and reaffirm masculine identity.

Beginning with the problem of women's exclusion from discourse, Irigaray's essay on mysticism in *Speculum*, 'La Mystérique', offers an account of the feminine in and through language in order to achieve an identification and recognition of the feminine, through a process of internalisation, in its own self-defined terms. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* Irigaray comments on the difficulties associated with this aim. She

writes that the "feminine cannot signify itself in any proper meaning or concept, not even that of woman" ⁴¹ since the term "woman" is a generic one which subsumes the feminine. Speaking of "woman" therefore underlines "the external position of the feminine with respect to the laws of discursivity" (*This Sex*, p.156). In her essay 'Woman can Never be Defined', Julia Kristeva shares Irigaray's concern. She puts forward a Lacanian-influenced account of the feminine which maintains that "woman" is something which does not even belong to the order of being, writing that it "follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists"; if "women have a role to play [...] it is only in assuming a *negative* function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society". ⁴²

Thus feminist theorists are presented with a fundamental problem. How can the idea of "woman" as something that cannot be spoken about, cannot be represented, be reconciled with a notion of the feminine that is connected to social, cultural and political realities? Indeed, Cornell and Thurschwell point out that there is at times "a slippage in Kristeva's discourse that can be interpreted as an attempt to identify the feminine with the 'meaning' of being a woman". ⁴³ On one hand feminist practice is grounded in the notion that the feminine can only ever be negative, while on the other hand any attempt to redefine or re-appropriate the feminine runs the risk of, as Diane Watt observed, "artificially" isolating feminine expression from male discourse.

These problems are acknowledged by Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One* when she points out that "studied gynocentrism" (*This Sex*, p.33) turns against its own aspirations. Since 'gyno' denotes female, gynocentrism is a strategy directly in opposition to phallocentrism. Both terms are concerned with the dominant expression of female or male attitudes. Gynocentrism therefore forms a separatist strategy where the notion of "woman" is re-appropriated and empowered. Irigaray goes on to clarify this position by suggesting that if the goal of feminist theorists "is to reverse the existing

order - even if that were possible - history would simply repeat itself and return to phallocratism, where neither women's sex, their imaginary, nor their language can exist" (*This Sex*, p.33). However, Irigaray's critique of a separatist strategy as the ultimate aim of 'feminine practice' does not preclude the attempt to open a space for the recognition of the feminine in its own terms, as she states:

To respond from another angle, we might say that it is because it has produced and continues to hold syntax that the masculine maintains mastery over discourse [...] Whereas the other syntax that would make feminine self-affection possible is lacking, repressed, censored: the feminine is never affected except by and for the masculine. What we would want to put into play, then, is a syntax that would make woman's self-affection possible. A self-affection that would certainly not be reducible to the economy of the sameness of the one, and for which the syntax and the meaning remain to be found" (*This Sex*, p.132).

In order to open up a space for feminine difference and "feminine self-affection" women need a place for "individual and collective consciousness raising concerning the specific oppression of women, a place where the desire of women by and for each other could be recognized" (*This Sex*, p.161). It has already been pointed out that in *Speculum of the Other Woman* Irigaray presents an analysis of the broader pattern of Western philosophy, focusing on the concepts of masculine discourse, and she uses the speculum image to search out the feminine in sexually specific terms. As the binary opposite of man, "woman" plays the role of the reflecting mirror that confers his identity by means of her ability to reflect him back to himself. In this position of negativity her identity has no space of its own. The significance of the speculum image is given further consideration later on in this chapter, for now all that need be noted is that Irigaray uses it to suggest the possibility of a female space, of a feminine core of identity and subjectivity. Her essay 'La Mystérique' makes it explicit that mystical discourse makes possible the discovery of an essential feminine self. With the discovery of this female space, this divine essence as Irigaray terms it, women are then able to articulate

their desire. Mysticism as the journey towards a sense of divine union is important to Irigaray in that, in women's visionary experience, communion with the divine essence can be seen as the means by which women also mediate relationships between themselves.

Therefore, analytic possibilities of visionary experience and its expression, particularly in the field of women's mystical writing, are greatly increased by a consideration of Irigaray. Indeed, critics such as Elizabeth Grosz, Carolyn Burke and Jane Gallop are among those who have signalled a critical shift in attitudes towards Irigaray.⁴⁴ This re-evaluation recognises Irigaray's insight into the role of feminine discourse. Her descriptions of sexual indifference have exposed general tendencies within Western thought associated with the power relations that define sexual difference, and her theological reflections have presented a critique of the phallogentric character of Western Christianity while simultaneously exploring a more positive idea of divinity. Elizabeth Grosz, for example, notes that through Irigaray's interest in and exploration of the divine it is possible to re-evaluate, revise, re-experience the divine in terms different from its traditional representations.⁴⁵ Pointing out that 'God' is the ultimate patriarch, Irigaray also suggests that his role shares similarities with that of women. If we accept the view that 'God' is a projection of man's identity then it follows that 'God' has no identity independent of the phallogentrism which created 'Him'. In pursuing her exploration of mysticism, Irigaray nevertheless warns us against the assumption that religious discourse unproblematically offers women an opportunity for self-expression in purely feminine terms. Indeed she rejects those who use patriarchal religion as a kind of expression of and compensation for their social powerlessness, since this would simply reposition women within the strictures of men's forms of self-worship, guaranteed by a God built in their own image, reinserting women into the passive and compliant position against which many have struggled.⁴⁶

In 'La Mystérique', which focuses on the search for a female sense of the divine, Irigaray is manifestly concerned with the extent to which the language of mysticism allows women to speak and to act publicly, as well as the extent to which women use their bodies as metaphors during the course of mystical experience. According to Irigaray, the mystical journey begins with a descent into a dark night. This experience is described in terms of fire and flames, light and dark, and takes place crucially when "consciousness is no longer master".⁴⁷ 'La Mystérique' is a name Irigaray seemingly reluctantly imposes on the 'mystical' experience in order to conform to a rational and "onto-logical perspective". It is a term she uses to describe a phenomenon which resists description.⁴⁸ Her interest in the concept of 'God' and the divine clearly stems from her analysis of the conditions necessary for the establishment of an autonomous identity for women. As Elizabeth Grosz observes, the concept of God has been used by men to disavow their debt to femininity and maternity.⁴⁹ Men conceive of a divine, omnipotent being, regarding themselves as being formed in 'His' image and thus partaking in 'His' divine creativity. Women need to disrupt the traditionally phallogocentric notion of 'God' by actively imagining an alternative divinity. The alternative perception of 'God' is conceived as infinite, offering an endless sphere of possibility, so that women are not reduced to a reflection of men. In this way, writes Grosz, Irigaray's 'God' can and should function as an alternative "political, ethical and aesthetic ideal"⁵⁰ of the emerging female subject.

Irigaray does not, of course, advocate a woman-centred religion since this would simply reverse the status quo. Instead she searches for the female divine. Irigaray's concept of the divine refers to the principle in which 'God' becomes a mode of self-completion. Elizabeth Grosz points out that Irigaray's view of God represents the "possibility of a perfection, an ideal, goal and trajectory for the subject, but only on condition that this God is one's own".⁵¹ Women must find a 'God' in their own image for

this is equal to the place in which "creativity, fertility and production must be positioned", and it is the space for the "projection of possible futures", linked, above all, with "love, self-love, and [love] of the Other".⁵²

Irigaray's concept of 'La Mystérique' locates female religiosity within the realms of mysticism, hysteria, mystery and femaleness, and, in her scheme, comprises a place from which women can articulate their desire. This would seem to be immediately problematical. For the very terms upon which it is founded, 'mysticism', 'hysteria', 'mystery' and 'femaleness', appear to reaffirm women's marginalised position. But it does not follow that this concept of mystical experience is negative. Indeed, it has already been noted in chapter one that it is precisely women's designation as mysterious and hysterical which enables them to resist definition in male terms.⁵³ Since, according to Irigaray, 'the masculine' is associated with logic and reason, she explores the possibility that in order to construct an idea of themselves as 'woman', women have to negotiate the "onto-logical perspective". In other words, they have to surpass the boundaries of logic and reason.

The principles of logic and reason are especially evident in the system of language, and Irigaray argues that within this system, the marginalised position of women affects their language. Since "'She' is indefinitely other in herself" (*This Sex*, pp.28-9), the language of women consequently becomes irrational. Thus women surpass the linguistic boundaries of logic and reason unintentionally. As Irigaray points out, women do not have a choice. However, Irigaray continues that this is again not necessarily negative. It is possible to see that within the order of language which is, for Irigaray, controlled, maintained, and dominated by men, the form of woman's language, like the form of her self, is "other" in order not to become fixed. In order not to be defined women actively resist conforming to exact definitions of meaning in language. Irigaray's argument in 'La Mystérique' engages with some of her key concerns

regarding sexual indifference and women's preclusion from male discourse.

Exploring the sexual specificity of women, Irigaray is renowned for her deconstruction of psychoanalytic representations of femininity to enable its representation and recognition in its own self-defined terms. Irigaray is also noted for her deconstruction of Plato's theoretic principles outlined in *The Republic*, and her inversion of Plato's 'simile of the cave' provides the basic structure for her argument in 'La Mystérique'.⁵⁴ Irigaray's inversion of Plato suggests the journey towards darkness rather than towards light, which in effect is a movement from reason to unreason. For Plato, contemplation of the divine, which would lead to illumination, corresponds to the individual's progress from the darkness of human ignorance towards the light of divinity, which is knowledge of the good. An evaluation of Irigaray's mystical philosophy enables us to see the woman's mystical journey in terms, not of a logical progression towards light and knowledge, but of regression. Irigaray believes that in order for women to "flee the logic" that has "framed" them they will "wander randomly and in darkness" (*La Mystérique*, p.193). Plato describes an intellectual process of thought, whereas Irigaray describes the reverse, but they both begin with the principle that human beings accept the reality which they are given until something happens which propels them along on a different course, enabling them to perceive alternative realities. This is the path to 'illumination' and for Plato this meant that one attains the knowledge of the good (a universal form) necessary to enable one to fulfil moral obligations, crucial to participation in public life. For Irigaray, the illumination comes as a "beam of light" which appears as a "luminous shadow" in the midst of confusion and darkness. Here Irigaray inverts meaning as the shadow itself becomes light and illumination. This illumination is a "contact with divine source" and is the first step in the woman's journey of self-discovery (*La Mystérique*, p.193). Only by resisting the process of rational thought can women resist or escape the "patriarchal net" which is dependent upon logic

and reason, so perceiving an alternative reality to the one prescribed by the systematic order, which enables women to discover an essential core of being, and which in turn enables them to realise a level of independence.⁵⁵

The speculum image is crucial to Irigaray's inversion of Plato. Speculum is, of course, a mirror, but it is also an instrument for inserting into and holding open a cavity of the body so that the dark interior may be inspected. Mysticism functions as just such an instrument, enabling women to search within themselves. Since women have no identity of their own, but function as a mirror for the male gaze to reflect upon itself, women must look within to find a mirror of their own. Irigaray's first reference to this in 'La Mystérique' is her statement: "Also about a 'burning glass' " (La Mystérique', p.191). The idea of the burning glass is deliberately obscured at this point as she emphasises the "extreme confusion" that heralds the beginning of mystical experience, though it does suggest an experience which is blazing in the sense of ardour and passion. Here Irigaray also observes that men can access this female sphere of darkness and confusion, but only if they follow " 'her' lead" (La Mystérique', p.191). For the man to follow he must give up his knowledge until he reaches the point "when he can no longer find himself as a 'subject' anymore" (La Mystérique', p.192). This, of course, is the point at which women begin their journey. Where in this "nocturnal wandering", asks Irigaray, "is the gaze to be fixed?" (La Mystérique', p.193). Women can only stumble on through the darkness until they find their essential self deep within. Irigaray describes the first moments of this discovery as illumination, and as "a *touch* that opens the 'soul' " so that it comes into contact with a "divine force" (La Mystérique', p.193). This divine force clearly comes from within and instantly enables the woman to realise "that she had always been herself, though she did not know it" (La Mystérique', p.193). The shock of the realisation that Irigaray describes has physical consequences, for the woman is "torn apart in pain, fear, cries, tears, and blood" (La Mystérique', p.193). Following this,

Irigaray writes that the "wound must come before the flame" (La Mystérique', p.193), which is significant since it demonstrates her knowledge of actual accounts of mystical experience, to which I will return shortly. In this section Irigaray continues to point to the importance of the perceived irrationality of the entire experience by signalling that "Words begin to fail her" (La Mystérique', p.193). In the midst of this seeming affliction the woman "senses" that "something *remains to be said* that resists all speech" (La Mystérique', p.193). Crucially, we learn that all "the words are weak, worn out [...]" So the best plan is to abstain from all discourse, to keep quiet" (La Mystérique', p.193). In the "torment" of affliction and in this self-imposed silence there is already another feeling of "delight" ('La Mystérique', p.193). As we shall see, the silence, as the woman rejects known forms of discourse, and the feelings of torment and delight are combined and encompass the first stage in Irigaray's speculative model.

Unlike the intellectual process described in Plato's model of the cave, Irigaray suggests that the journey can only take place when "the higher mental faculties are in a deep slumber" (La Mystérique', p.194). For Irigaray it is vital that these faculties be rendered insensible as they would impede the woman's progress towards her own enlightenment. This must take place "in such secrecy and deep oblivion that no intelligence, no common sense, can have precise knowledge of it" ('La Mystérique', p.194). Only in this way can the woman descend into "the depths of the abyss of the 'soul' " and discover there the mirror which enables her to see her self. "Thus", writes Irigaray, positioning herself as the mirror image, "I have become your image in this nothingness that I am, and you gaze upon mine in your absence of being", a "living mirror, thus, am I (to) your resemblance as you are mine" (La Mystérique', p.197). Mysticism is traditionally a journey towards 'God' but Irigaray enables us to see that, for women, it is also a journey towards the discovery of the self which is achieved when the "deepest summit of her cave has been touched"(La Mystérique', p.201). Internalisation

leads to a discovery of female subjectivity and a level of self-knowledge which enables women to assert their own identities in the "I am" that Irigaray writes, and results in a core of knowing that is separate from male discourse.

Irigaray harnesses all of the usual negative images associated with women and with mystical experience, such as irrationality, fluidity, lack of subjectivity, and negation of being, in order to demonstrate the positivity and richness of that experience. This in turn enables us to see the pertinence of the place which is 'La Mystérique' to female experience in general, but how specific is this to actual accounts of female mystical experience?

Since mystics generally believe that divine illumination is accessible through unconditional love and concentrated dedication manifested in sincere prayer and religious devotion, it was a form of expression readily available to women who existed at a time when their virtual silence in the public sphere was assumed. Effectively excluded from public affairs because of their gender, women like the medieval mystics Hildegard of Bingen, St. Bridget, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Catherine of Siena and Angela of Foligno, to name only a few, succeeded in becoming prominent figures in the mystical tradition. These women participated in mystical discourse, yet this does not, on the surface, seem to fit with Irigaray's model since the conscious expression of religious devotion would preclude the cessation of conscious thought which Irigaray believed was necessary to achieve illumination. However, Irigaray's essay suggests an extensive knowledge of mystical tropes.⁵⁶ In medieval women's mystical writing, mysticism was the essence of being and not being. This movement between ethereal and material modes of expression is evocative of Irigaray's argument that seeking "God" is also the search for selfhood.

We have already encountered Irigaray's claim that the "wound must come before the flame." The juxtaposition of pain and passion manifest in Irigaray's account of the

mystical journey from darkness to illumination finds a correspondent expression in the writing of medieval women mystics. In the mystical journey described by Julian of Norwich, for example, the woman mystic journeys through darkness to illumination, which leads to a sense of union with the divine. Mystics testify that the desire for mystical union is the desire for the body of Christ. With her attention fixed on an image of the Crucifix suspended over her sick bed, we learn that Julian of Norwich beheld "continually a parte of his passion" that lead her to describe Christ as a physically desirable lover: "I saw him and sought him, and I had hym and wantyd hym".⁵⁷ In St. Bridget's *Revelations* the words of Christ also suggest that the focus of desire is Christ's physicality. In the "hevenly revelacyons of God to blissid Bregith", Christ tells her that "myn godhed is never separat from myn manhed [...] And that same body dayli is offred now in the awter, that mankynde the more fervently shuld love me".⁵⁸

Irigaray understands the potency of these images in terms of a divine approbation of the female, arguing that the immediacy of the relationship between Christ and the woman mystic manifests the woman's belief that "love conquers everything that has already been said" (*La Mystérique*, p.199). This sounds rather trite, but it engages with the biblical assertions of what Irigaray describes as woman's "non-value" (*La Mystérique*, p.199). The female experience of mystical union demonstrates that ultimately "God" does value "woman", and that, as Irigaray puts it, "one man, at least, has understood her so well that he died in the most awful suffering" (*La Mystérique*, p.199) Christ is particularly significant in that he is "the most female of men" (*La Mystérique*, p.199). Irigaray emphasises the compelling nature of the image of Christ's Passion for the woman mystic who "never ceases to look upon his nakedness, open for all to see, upon the gashes in his virgin flesh, at the wounds from the nails" (*La Mystérique*, pp.199-200). In her identification of Christ's body with the female body, Irigaray is not advocating that women imitate or become the crucified

Christ, rather, that this image enables them to "love" their own selves. Since, according to Irigaray, the woman mystic sees in Christ the same "glorious slit" (*La Mystérique*, p.200) that in her body is naturally open, 'His' crucifixion, mirrors the female body and also redeems it. In her suggestion that Christ's wounds reflect the female body, Irigaray claims a female embodiment of the divine. Just as the woman mystic sees and experiences herself in him, "He is also in her". In this way the "wound" is holy. Irigaray pursues the notion that a "a sore [could] be *holy*" (*La Mystérique*, p.200) by considering the implications of this for women mystics.

What would it mean for women contemplating the figure of Christ that such signs of physical corruption as sores and blood are holy? In accounts of the mystical journey by medieval women writers, their experience invariably begins with illness, and as we see in the case of Julian, illness comprises part of what is desired. For Julian physical ailment is the only way she can experience herself in relation to Christ:

I desyred to haue all maner of paynes, bodily and ghostly, that I should haue if I should haue died, all the dredys and temptations of fiendes, and all maner of other paynes, saue the out passing of the sowle. And this ment I, for I would be purgied by the mercie of god, and after liue more to the worshippe / of god by cause of that sicknes. (*Showings*, p.287)

If she does not experience physical pain and suffer sickness, she feels as nothing, "for nothing that was in earth that me lyketh to leue for" (*Showings*, p.289). It is through her painful and feeling relationship with God that Julian overcomes her sense of nothingness or fragmentation; as she claims, "sodenly all my paine was taken from me, and I was as hole, and namely in the over parte of my bodie, as ever I was befor" (*Showings*, p.292). If the mystic herself does not experience pain and sickness she goes in search of it. The Italian mystics Catherine of Siena and Angela of Foligno are notorious for their obsession with wounds. Catherine of Siena wore rough wool clothing, and iron chain bound around her hips so tightly that it inflamed her skin, and

she flagellated herself thrice daily with an iron chain for ninety minutes at a time.

Angela of Foligno is famed for the incident which occurred when she went with a companion to the local hospital of San Feliciano to wash the feet and hands of the sick men and women. In washing a leper whose flesh was so putrefied and rotten that pieces peeled off into the wash basin she was using, she then proceeded to drink this mixture which gave her the sense that she was receiving communion, and when a piece of flesh got stuck in her throat she tried to swallow it, until against her will she choked it out.⁵⁹ These women enacted the belief that sores were indeed holy, and in so doing empowered themselves, as the words from Angela of Foligno demonstrate "The Word was made flesh to make me God". Significantly, this is one of the quotations with which Irigaray begins her essay, and she writes, positioning herself again as the subject, that the moment of the mystic's realisation that the sore is holy, "in the sight of the nails and the spear piercing the body of the Son I drink in a joy that no word can ever express" ('La Mystérique', p.200), is the moment of empowerment. For it corresponds with the mystic's realisation that "if the Word was made flesh in this way, and to this extent, it can only have been to make me (become) God" ('La Mystérique', p.200).

Thus Irigaray's deconstruction of Plato combined with her knowledge of the experience of women mystics enables us to see the significance of 'La Mystérique' for women, in that, as she states in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, it disconcerts "the staging of representation according to *exclusively* 'masculine' parameters, that is, according to phallocratic order" (*This Sex*, p.30). For the role of "femininity" is prescribed by a masculine specula(riza)tion and corresponds scarcely at all to woman's desire.⁶⁰ And the archetypal expression of women's desire is, for Irigaray, symbolised in the ecstasy of mystical union. For women to experience and express desire they must discover what accounts for the power of the phallocratic order, so that they are able to disrupt "its position of mastery" (*This Sex*, p.74).

This chapter has demonstrated that mysticism is both an abstract and a concrete phenomenon. It is abstract in that it is a conceptual means of enabling 'woman' to communicate her desire as a means of disrupting "systems that are self-representative of a 'masculine subject' ", and it is concrete in that it was considered a very real means of understanding the historical events of the 1640s. In both of these forms mysticism serves a political function. For the Fifth Monarchists, mystical revelations were used as part of their political strategy, and for Irigaray, mystical revelation enables women to challenge the masculinised political order in their own terms. These perspectives are crucial to our interpretation of the problems addressed in the following chapters, chiefly associated with definitions of the feminine. The application of Irigarayan theory to historical material allows us to apprehend the full import of the Fifth Monarchist use of and reliance on women's visionary experience. Thus, in Irigaray's words, we will be able to determine what "they have borrowed that is feminine, from the feminine" (*This Sex*, p.74), as well as assessing the extent to which the Fifth Monarchy women understood themselves in purely feminine terms. In later chapters, the analysis of Irigaray's model of the feminine embodiment of divinity is taken further by considering in greater detail the gendered motifs through which the women mystics understood their experience. The enervation of illness, fasting, and ecstatic trances are just a few aspects of the mystical journey which offer a range of interpretative possibilities, and which function to dramatise the discursive relationship between the mystic and the divine spirit, enabling women mystics to re-figure their bodies and define the feminine in their own terms. In all this my aim is to offer a reconstruction of a past revealed through extant mystical texts and it is to the specific historical reality of such texts that I now turn.

NOTES

- 1 See Michel de Certeau *The Mystic Fable Volume One The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.8. Hereafter cited in the text as *Mystic Fable*.
- 2 Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, LA & Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p.116, see also p.119.
- 3 See Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), chapters eight and nine, and Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), chapter 6. Hereafter cited in the text as *Heterologies*.
- 4 William Aspinwall, *A Brief Description of the Fifth Monarchy* (1653) Wing A4004, p.1. Hereafter cited in the text as *Brief Description*.
- 5 For this interpretation of the downfall of all earthly monarchies, see Aspinwall's *A Brief Description*, p.1. Aspinwall refers specifically to Daniel 7.
- 6 Ibid., here Aspinwall refers specifically to Revelation 11.15.
- 7 See Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp.38, 56-88, 88-9; and Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p.52.
- 8 See Richard H. Popkin (ed.), *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650-1800* (Leiden, New York, Kobenhavn, Koln: E.J. Brill, 1988), p.5. See also Bernard Capp, 'The Political Dimension of Apocalyptic Thought' in Patrides & Wittreich (eds.), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp.93-124, p.109.
- 9 Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men*, pp.23-49, 14.
- 10 Ibid., p.14.
- 11 Alfred Cohen, 'The Fifth Monarchy Mind: Mary Cary and the Origins of Totalitarianism' in *Social Research* 31 (1964), pp.195-213, p.196.
- 12 Kate Chedgzoy, 'Female Prophecy in the Seventeenth Century: the Instance of Anna Trapnel' in William Zunder and Suzanne Trill (eds.), *Writing and the English Renaissance* (London & New York: Longman, 1996), pp.238-254, p.247.
- 13 *True Levellers Standard Advanced* (1649) Wing T2716, TT E552(5), p.2. Hereafter cited in the text as *Levellers Standard*.
- 14 Christopher Feake, *A Beam of Light* (1659) Wing F567, TT E980(5), p.7.

- 15 From Gerrard Winstanley, *The Vindication of the Diggers* (1649) Wing W3043, TT E1365(1).
- 16 See Reay's introduction to the collection of essays in McGregor, J.F. and Reay, B. (eds.), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, rpt. 1988), p.19.
- 17 Reay, *Radical Religion*, p.19.
- 18 J.C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.18.
- 19 Ibid., pp.76-83.
- 20 Ibid., pp.84-86.
- 21 Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp.7,9.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Davis, *Fear, Myth and History*, p.92.
- 24 Nor did the Fifth Monarchists advocate antinomianism, they believed in the reality of sin, the forgiveness of which was a sign of God's mercy. This will be given further consideration in chapter five.
- 25 Feake, *A Beam of Light*, p.33.
- 26 John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh* (1653) Wing R1813, title page.
- 27 Elizabeth Avery, *Scripture-Prophecies Opened* (1647) Wing A4272, p.i.
- 28 Mary Cary, *A Word in Season* (1647) Wing C739, pp.4,5. Hereafter cited in the text as *Word in Season*.
- 29 See Cary, *A Word in Season*, p.5.
- 30 Henry Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced* (1647) Wing J687, p.v. Both Sarah Wight and Henry Jessey were supporters of the Fifth Monarchy movement rather than members of it. Jessey was a Baptist minister who formed close ties with prominent Fifth Monarchists, and John Simpson and Vavasor Powell were eventually converted to Baptist practices. Murray Tolmie has charted the beginning of Henry Jessey's career, and points out that he was a prominent figure in the sectarian movement, holding strong Fifth Monarchist sympathies. See *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* (Cambridge, London, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp.12-19.
- 31 These were *Strange and Wonderful Newes from Whitehall* Wing T2034, Anna

Trapnel *The Cry of a Stone: Or a Relation of Something Spoken in Whitehall* Wing T2031, Anna Trapnel *A Legacy for Saints* Wing T2032, and Anna Trapnel *Report and Plea* Wing T2033.

- 32 Chedgzoy, 'Female Prophecy', p.248.
- 33 See Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), pp.5-6.
- 34 Ibid. This concern is part of Watt's insistence that a tradition of female prophecy does not exist.
- 35 Margaret Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) , pp.2-3. Whitford focuses on these three criticisms of Irigaray because they have been widely acknowledged, even though, as she points out, a closer reading of Irigaray reveals them to be inaccurate. For example, the reduction of Irigaray's work to the 'writing the body' formula centres on only one of her texts, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, and so ignores the totality of her work. For a further discussion of the mother/daughter relationship, see Marianne Hirsch, 'Mothers and daughters: a review essay' in *Signs* 7 (1981) pp.200-222. For a further discussion of Irigaray's views on the ethics of sexual difference and the necessity for a recognition of women's difference and for symbolic forms corresponding to female specificity, see Teresa de Lauretis, 'The Essence of the Triangle Or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the US and Britain' in *Differences* 1 (1989) pp.3-37.
- 36 Luce Irigaray, 'Linguistic Sexes and Genders' in Deborah Cameron (ed.), *The Feminist Critique of Language*, Second edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) pp.119-123, p.119. For a further discussion of women's speech and its relationship to sexual identity, see Jennifer Coates and Mary Ellen Jordan, 'Que(e)rying Friendship: Discourses of Resistance and the Construction of Gendered Subjectivity' in Anna Livia and Kira Hall (eds.), *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp.214-32. For further discussions of language and its relation to gender and sexism, see Tina Beattie, *God's Mother Eve's Advocates: A Gynocentric Refiguration of Marian Symbolism in Engagement with Luce Irigaray* (Bristol: Centre for Comparative Studies in Religion and Gender, 1999); Cora Kaplan, 'Language and Gender' in Deborah Cameron (ed.), *The Feminist Critique of Language* pp.54-64; and Jennifer Coates, ' "Thanks God I'm a Woman": The Construction of Differing Femininities' in Deborah Cameron (ed.), *The Feminist Critique of Language*, pp.295-320.
- 37 Jane Gallop *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982) pp.95-6.
- 38 Drucilla Cornell and Adam Thurschwell 'Feminism, Negativity and Intersubjectivity' in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (eds.) *Feminism as Critique* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) pp.143-62, p.146.
- 39 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Norton Press, 1977) p.287, quoted in Cornell and Thurschwell 'Feminism, Negativity and Intersubjectivity',

p146.

- 40 Cornell and Thurschwell, Op. cit., p.148.
- 41 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, rpt. 1993), pp.155-6. Hereafter cited in the text as *This Sex*.
- 42 Julia Kristeva, 'Woman can Never be Defined' and Julia Kristeva, 'Oscillation Between Power and Denial' in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms* (New York: Schocken, 1981), pp.137,166.
- 43 Cornell and Thurschwell, Op. cit., p.149.
- 44 See for example Carolyn Burke, 'Irigaray through the looking glass' in *Feminist Studies* 7 (1981) pp.288-306, Carolyn Burke, 'Romancing the philosophers: Luce Irigaray' in Dianne Hunter (ed.), *Seduction and Theory: Feminist Readings on Representation and Rhetoric* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1989), and Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982)
- 45 See Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p.151.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Luce Irigaray, 'La Mystérique' in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, rpt. 1994), pp.191-202, p.191; hereafter cited in the text as 'La Mystérique'.
- 48 Irigaray writes that 'La Mystérique' is "how one might refer to what, within a still theological onto-logical perspective is called mystic language or discourse", 'La Mystérique', p.191.
- 49 See Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p.152.
- 50 Ibid., p.159.
- 51 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* p.160.
- 52 Ibid., p.162.
- 53 See this thesis, pp.11-12. Defining the feminine in its own terms is a crucial aspect of Irigaray's explanation of sexual indifference in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, pp.69-70. Here Irigaray points out that Freud had "brought to light something that had been operative all along though it remained implicit, hidden, unknown: *the sexual indifference that underlies the truth of any science, the logic of every discourse.*" This is readily apparent, continues Irigaray, "in the way Freud defines female sexuality." For this sexuality "is never defined with respect to any sex but the masculine. Freud does not see two sexes whose differences

are articulated in the act of intercourse, and, more generally speaking, in the imaginary and symbolic processes that regulate the workings of a society and a culture. The "feminine" is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex." In Freud's scheme the feminine is defined "as a negative image that provides male sexuality with an unfailingly phallic self-representation".

- 54 Irigaray affirms in *This Sex* that her deconstruction of Plato is crucial to *Speculum* as a whole. Irigaray suggests that working backwards through history, beginning with Freud and ending with Plato, provides us with a unique and insightful perspective from which to explore the issue of "woman's" place in discourse (see *This Sex*, p.68). Plato unites contemplation, intellectual activity and human action in his 'simile of the cave', which begins with the description of manacled prisoners in a cave who are allowed to see only shadows of men carrying all sorts of things. These shadows are thrown by a fire onto a wall of the cave opposite the prisoners who assume that the shadows are the real thing. Plato considers what would happen if they were released from their bonds and cured of their delusions. It would be a painful process, the individual who was freed would be faced with alternative realities. And if 'he' was dragged out into the sunlight 'he' would be so dazzled by the glare of it that 'he' would not be able to see a single one of the things 'he' was now told were real. Gradually, 'he' would become accustomed to looking at light, at reflections and at the objects themselves, till finally 'he' would realise that the sun produces changing seasons and years, and controls everything in the visible world. Plato then considers what would happen if 'he' went back into the cave. 'His' eyes would be blinded by the darkness, because 'he' had just come in suddenly from the light. To the others 'he' would appear foolish, and they would therefore assume 'his' visit to the upper world had ruined his sight, and that the ascent was not worth attempting. And if anyone tried to release them they would kill 'him' if they could. The realm revealed by sight corresponds to the prison, the light of the fire to the power of the sun. Ascent to the upper world corresponds with the upward progress of the mind into the intelligible region, but it is the return to the cave that enables the subject to grasp the 'Idea of the Good' for although 'he' is illuminated 'he' must be able to communicate 'his' experience. The significance of this intellectual process is that it enables us to attain moral worth since the form of the good is perceived in the intelligible region, responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything, producing light and the source of light. Anyone acting in public or private life must have sight of this. Contemplation of the divine life would correspond with the manacled prisoner's contemplation of light. Stumbling is part of the process. We are not to think it strange that anyone who descends from contemplation of the divine to human should blunder and make a fool of him/herself, if while still unaccustomed to surrounding darkness. See Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 1986), pp.316-25, and pp.341-43.
- 55 The term "patriarchal net" is taken from an internet site on Irigaray's *Speculum l'autre Femme* (1974). It comments on Irigaray's text by featuring a series of slides, the twelfth of which makes the statement: "women are mystic, slipping through the patriarchal net". See http://english.olivet.edu/RBELCHER/lit310/feminist_criticism/sld012htm The term is a reference to "l'ordre patriarcal" which refers to the symbolic order, one aspect

of which is the appropriation of the feminine. Irigaray suggests this appropriation is signified by naming since it is the patriarchal name that determines ownership of the family. In *This Sex* she writes, for example, that the patriarchal order is indeed the one that functions as the *organisation and monopolisation of private property to the benefit of the head of the family*. See *This Sex*, p.79. An analysis of women's exploitation is also an analysis of modes of appropriation, these modes of appropriation begin at the familial level and extend into the public sphere.

- 56 Irigaray's essay draws from the spirituality of the 13th century mystic Marguerite Porete who was burned at the stake for self-deification.
- 57 Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (eds.), *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, part two, the Long Text. Studies and Texts 35 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), pp324,326. Hereafter cited in the text as *Showings*.
- 58 Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Liber Celestis of St. Bridget of Sweden*, vol.1. Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.6.
- 59 For a fuller account of the "grotesque" obsession these two women had with the body see Laurie A. Finke, 'Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision' in Ulrike Wiethaus (ed.), *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp.28-44.
- 60 See *This Sex*, p.30. If further clarification of this is needed we can compare Irigaray's reading of the female experience of mystical union with a masculine one: Lacan's reading of St. Teresa's ecstatic trance encapsulated by Bernini. Indeed, Irigaray points to Bernini's statue of St. Teresa in ecstatic trance, to demonstrate that, in Lacanian terms, "Women are not worth listening to, especially when they try to speak of their pleasure". Thus Irigaray dismisses Lacan's notoriously flippant appraisal of the statue, in which he is reported to have said: "Just go look at Bernini's statue in Rome, you'll see right away that St. Teresa is coming, there's no doubt about it", as a masculinised attempt to contain anything which challenges the symbolic order. For Irigaray, Lacan's reaction to this statue reveals that the question whether, in Lacan's logic, women can "articulate anything at all, whether they can be heard, is not even raised. For raising it would mean granting that there may be some other logic, and one that upsets his own. That is, a logic that challenges mastery." (*This Sex*, p.90) Lacan awards the right to experience pleasure to a statue for "statue-women" are the "only ones who are acceptable in the logic of his desire." (*This Sex*, p.91) Not only is Lacan unable to "read" the signs of St. Teresa's pleasure, but he assumes the relationship between seeing and knowing as if the woman's body can only stage the obvious, as if it must both betray and offer up its pleasure to the male privileged as spectator and interpreter. As a man, Lacan assumes this position, and claims that in this moment of observation seeing and understanding are one and the same thing; that simply seeing an image unproblematically reproduces its meaning. As Irigaray points out, how can one "read the "signs" at all "when one is a "man"?" (*This Sex*, p.91) For a "man", St. Teresa's experience of mystical union is debased and undermined because she is lack - the phallus

being the only signifier. For an additional account of this see also Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.156.

CHAPTER THREE

MYSTICAL TRADITIONS: THE DISSEMINATION OF MEDIEVAL MYSTICISM AND THE FIFTH MONARCHISTS

Female visionary experience is particularly associated with the High to Late Middle Ages, but the recurrence of it in England during the seventeenth century which is exemplified by the Fifth Monarchy women, impacts on the debate surrounding the possibility of a conscious female tradition of women's visionary writing. Although a general residue of medieval mystical texts in England in the seventeenth century certainly suggests transhistorical and cross-cultural influences, there has been a reluctance to acknowledge a conscious tradition of women's mysticism. Diane Watt's study of female prophecy from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century makes explicit reference to the long term influences of the mystics St. Bridget and Margery Kempe, but she states clearly that it does not "argue for a *single* tradition of female prophecy, or suggest that it is a consistent, transhistorical phenomenon"¹. Similarly, Gerda Lerner notes that the influence of Hildegard of Bingen extends into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but affirms that this does not indicate a tradition of female mysticism: "The women of talent existed, they struggled valiantly, they achieved – and they were forgotten. The women coming after them had to start all over again".² On the other hand, Vicki Collins has recently begun to extend the study of Catholic mystical discourse into Protestantism. Though her focus is the eighteenth-century Methodist journal of Hester Ann Rogers, she suggests the existence of links which cross the religious, cultural and temporal divide.³

The central questions arising from this are: did the Fifth Monarchy women stumble through their mystical journey unaware of the old mystical tropes, reaching the same conclusions as their medieval forbears by coincidence? Or were they directly

influenced by a knowledge of medieval women's mysticism? By examining the dissemination of pertinent medieval texts in both print and manuscript form, it is the aim of this chapter to determine the degree to which the influence of medieval women's mysticism channels into the sectarian culture of civil war England, shaping in particular the achievement of Fifth Monarchy women.

When trying to assess the impact of printing on ordinary people, Natalie Zemon Davis pointed out that the printed book is not merely a source for ideas and images, it is also "a carrier of relationships".⁴ Nigel Smith has noted the importance of print in functioning as a 'carrier of relationships', as ideas and experiences are transferred from author to author. He has argued that the Fifth Monarchist John Rogers "removes the historical divide between the age of prophecy and the mid-seventeenth century".⁵ For Rogers the age of prophecy was the high Middle Ages, and the bringing together of prophecy and experience in his writing encompasses not only the visionary trances of Trappel and others, but also the experiences of past visionaries extant in print.⁶ Within the Fifth Monarchist movement prophecy as divinely inspired utterance often involved apocalyptic visions as a result of the mystic's direct communion with God. This was also true of the great medieval mystics, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and St. Bridget, who, as respected prophetesses in their own lifetimes, proclaimed divine messages as a direct result of their visionary experiences. Paradoxically, it is partly through male authored texts such as Rogers' *Ohel* or John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* that the writing and experiences of these medieval women mystics was carried through to the seventeenth century. In assessing the level of the medieval influence on millenarian writers of the Fifth Monarchy movement, it is important to contextualise these texts. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the residue of medieval mysticism in the seventeenth century by considering both the Catholic and Protestant traditions.

The Catholic Tradition

Perhaps it is significant that of the renowned male medieval mystics Bernard of Clairvaux, Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle, Thomas à Kempis, Nicholas Love, Louis de Blois, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, only Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas à Kempis had texts re-printed in the seventeenth century.⁷ For it suggests that prophecy within the mystical tradition was becoming increasingly associated with the feminine. Apart from the obvious examples of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, it is well known that Richard Rolle composed some of his most important works for devout women, and the Vernon Manuscript demonstrates the prevalence and importance of the fact that the devotional genre was intended for a female readership. Rolle's epistle, "Thou that list love, harken and hear of love: in the song of love it is written, 'I sleep and my heart wakes' " is addressed to a nun of Yedingham; Rolle's *Commandment*, was written to a nun in Hampole; and Rolle's *Form of Living*, was written "to a recluse that was clepet Margarete". We also find that the earliest version of the *Scale of Perfection*, was addressed by Walter Hilton to his "Ghostly Sister in Jesu Christ".⁸ These works establish the existence of a genre of devotional prose written in English for women. In addition to this, as Paul Strauss has noted, John Fisher's *Tower Works* follow this tradition. Writing in English, Fisher addressed the works to his sister, Elizabeth, a woman religious living the cloistered life.⁹

One of the most renowned of the devotional writers of the Middle Ages was Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). Within the Catholic church, Hildegard's writing and music remained authoritative throughout the medieval and early modern period, and even as we enter the twenty-first century the words of a twelfth-century nun and mystic continue to have popular appeal.¹⁰ Hildegard wrote prodigiously, producing the mystical works *Scivias*, *The Book of Life's Merits*, and *The Book of Divine Works*; as well as

medical and scientific treatises, poetry, music, a full-length morality play, and a series of illustrations intended to clarify her visions. Hildegard began her literary career at the relatively late age of forty-two, having suffered torments, both physical and mental. Convinced finally that God wished her to write down her prophecies, in 1147 she successfully petitioned Pope Eugenius to endorse her writing.¹¹ Only four years later Pope Eugenius affirmed Hildegard's eminent position in another letter: "We rejoice, my daughter, and we exult in the Lord, because your honourable reputation has spread so far and wide that many people regard you as 'the odour unto life' [II Cor. 2.16]" (*Letters* p.35). By the time of her death she was widely respected as a great intellectual and her position in the Catholic canon of devotional writers was thus secure.

Of the English devotional writers, it is widely acknowledged that the texts of Julian of Norwich (c.1342-1416) have had a more continuous life than those of any other Middle English mystic. There are four extant manuscripts of Julian's sixteen *Revelations of Divine Love*, two each of the shorter and longer versions, and their history in both manuscript and print has been well researched.¹² The two pre-Reformation manuscripts of the *Revelations* are of the Short Text, the earliest of which (BL MS Additional 37790) was made sometime after 1435 from an exemplar dated 1413, as is evident from its opening, which refers to Julian as still alive in that year. The Carthusian monks, who also preserved the unique manuscript copy of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, must be credited with its preservation. The only other pre-Reformation Julian manuscript, dated around 1500, is now Westminster Treasury MS 4 in the Westminster Archdiocesan Archives; it contains selections from the Long Text combined with selections from Walter Hilton.¹³ The only complete manuscripts of the Long Text are post-Reformation. The first of these is the Paris Manuscript (Bibliothèque Nationale fonds anglais MS 40), written sometime between the late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth-century.¹⁴ This is Benedictine, and is listed in the *Catalogue of the MS*

Books Belonging to the Library of the English Benedictine Nunnes of Our B. Lady Of Good Hope in Paris (MS. 405-8, Biblioteque Mazarine, Paris) as 'The Revelations of Sainte Julian'.¹⁵ Hugh Paulinus Cressy's printed edition of Julian's *Revelations* appeared in 1670, and it is believed that Cressy began work on this sometime after his ordination in 1651 when he was sent as a chaplain to the newly-founded house of English Benedictine nuns in Paris. Finally, the Sloane Manuscript (BL MS Sloane 2499) is dated around 1650 and was written by Mother Clementina Cary (b.1615), founder of the Benedictine nunnery at Paris, otherwise known as Anne, daughter of Elizabeth Cary, The Lady Falkland.¹⁶

Together these manuscripts, particularly the seventeenth-century versions of the Long Text, are testimony to the invaluable work done by recusant nuns in preserving their spiritual heritage. The English Benedictines at Cambrai and Paris continued the tradition of copying, transcribing, translating, composing, and preserving books and manuscripts in their libraries; conscious, as Dorothy Latz has pointed out, "of the urgency of handing down to posterity a spiritual treasure in danger of being lost amid persecution and civil war in England".¹⁷ In addition to the *Revelations* of Julian of Norwich, the Benedictine nuns also held in their library a copy of St. Bridget's *Revelations*, listed in the *Lady of Good Hope Catalogue* as 'Saint Bridgets Revelations begun to be translated as a preamble'.¹⁸

Although the recusant nuns at Cambrai and Paris were primarily concerned with the classics of English spirituality, their interest in St. Bridget (1303-1373) is understandable as the influence of this Swedish mystic remained fairly strong in England throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The English St. Bridgettine house, Syon Abbey (founded in 1415 by Henry V on the banks of Thames near his palace at Richmond) was closed in 1539, but the persistence of some of its members ensured the continuation of the St. Bridgettine order, at least until 1587.¹⁹

Significantly, Syon did not have its own press as some of the continental houses did, thus the brethren, particularly Richard Whytford, supplied material to commercial printers. The early printers used several wood-cuts of the saint to illustrate books connected with her (Figure 1). The main theme was to show her receiving her Revelations with her pilgrim's staff, cap and purse included in the illustration.²⁰



Figure 1. A woodcut showing St. Bridget in the act of writing down her visions, from Pepwell's *Dietary of Ghostly Helthe* (1520) STC 6833.

The visual evidence of St. Bridget's influence in England also includes her appearance on a new tympanum at Angmering in Sussex; at St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall there was a cloth with an image of the saint; there is a marble statue of St. Bridget still in the possession of the Syon community; and artistic representations of her appear on several rood-screens in East Anglia and Devon.²¹ As with the manuscript versions of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, many religious works were printed surreptitiously at home or on the Continent due to the tensions created by the Reformation. Thus, other indications of St. Bridget's English influence is John Falconer's *The life of S. Catherine a princely virgin, [...] daughter to St. Bridget*, (1634), and Alfonso de Villegas *The lives of Saints*, the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh editions of which include 'the life of St. Bridget' (1628).²² Also two editions of *The Most Devout Prayers of St Brigitte* were printed in English at Antwerp in 1659 and 1663. Since the Latin *Revelations* of St. Bridget would only have appealed to a learned reading public, the various vernacular versions were intended for a limited, but growing lay audience of the pious, and extracts were incorporated into many works, particularly those offering counsel on the Christian life, but also along with selections from the Gospels and sermons. The *Prayers of St. Bridget* are incorporated into an untitled edition of devotional works held at the Bar Convent in York.²³ There is also a Protestant collection entitled *A Manual of Devout Prayers* (1672) which includes the prayers of St. Bridget, printed by Nathaniel Thompson. By this time the *Revelations* seem to have become simply a treatise on leading the Christian life, with St. Bridget upheld as an example, offering advice and warnings to her readers.²⁴

The Benedictine nuns of the mid-seventeenth century also had access to the *Life* of St. Teresa (1515-83) which is again listed in the Lady of Good Hope *Catalogue* as *St. Tiresia Her Life, The Pilgrim Traveling Toward Jerusalem*.²⁵ St. Teresa was another woman mystic renowned in her own lifetime as a great teacher and writer of mystical

masterpieces, *The Interior Castle* (1577) and *The Way of Perfection* (1579). And as a determined reformer of the Carmelite order St. Teresa journeyed throughout Spain founding and administering seventeen monasteries.²⁶ Seventeenth-century reprints of St. Teresa's works were printed in Antwerp and include her *Lyf*, which was printed twice in 1611 and again in 1642 as *The Flaming Hart*. Like St. Bridget's *Devout Prayers* (1659, 1686) which were printed in English, these texts were clearly intended for an English readership, and not necessarily confined to those recusants who fled to the continent. The *Short Title Catalogue* also cites a text entitled *The true catholic: collected out of the oracles and psalteries of the holy Ghost* with a preface by T. Packer from Ribera's *Lyf of Teresa* (1628), the third edition of which was printed in 1632. St. Teresa's *Works* were printed in London 1675, and *The Life* printed in London 1669 and 1671.

Overall, it is evident that English recusants, like the daughters of Elizabeth Cary, who fled to the Continent were familiar with medieval mystical texts by Julian of Norwich, St. Bridget and others. Along with the four daughters of Elizabeth Cary (Anne, Lucy, Elizabeth, and Mary) were four of Thomas More's descendants, Helen who took the name of Gertrude, her sister St. Bridget who later became Superior at Paris, and their cousins Agnes (Dame Grace) and Anne More. Gertrude More (1606-33) reportedly "read over [...] all the books that were in the house, or that she could get from abroad, printed and manuscript, and read them seriously".²⁷ She began writing responses to these other authors and also composing her own prayers and meditations. "Some others in the house liked them so well, that they copied them out, and in time a great store of these amorous affections of her collection, or framing, were to be found scattered here and there in divers books and papers."²⁸ Margaret Ezell also points out that the religious devotions of More were circulated in manuscript form during her lifetime although published posthumously as *The Holy Practices of a Divine Lover*

(1657) and *The Spiritual Exercises* (1658), and, after her death, these separate pieces were assembled by the head of the house at Cambrai, Father Augustine Baker, to form the second and third sections of a book with the rather strange subtitle: *The Ideots Devotions*.²⁹ During her lifetime Dame Gertrude More compiled a list of books which she personally recommended for aspiring mystics. Her list included Hugh and Richard of St. Victor (Richard of St. Victor's work included work by Margery Kempe), Walter Hilton, St. Bernard, St. Bridget, St. Catherine of Sienna, and St. Teresa of Avila. A further known source for her work was Julian of Norwich's *Showings*. Dorothy Latz has pointed to several specific similarities between Julian's *Revelations*, or *Showings*, and More's mystical poetry.³⁰ But in fact More's poetry resounds with Julian's very generalised belief in divine love. Julian communicates the value of "Need, Love, [and] Longing" when she writes of a "Longing in the form of Love" that "draweth us into Heaven; for the thirst of *God* is to have the general man into him. In which thirst he hath drawn his Holy Souls that be now in bliss." (*Revelations*, p.193) According to Julian, love is the medium by which one's soul can pass into heaven, God is thirsty for it, and in answering his thirst with an equal one, as it is a basic "need", the "holy souls" receive his blessing and remain in bliss for all eternity. This intrinsic longing and need for divine love is echoed by Dame Gertrude in "Our Hearts Are Restless". Here she claims that "God alone" is "our chiefest good", because God equals "sweet Love". "And henceforth", she writes,

...let me draw no breath,
but to aspire by Love
To Thee, my *God*, and all my good,
by Whom I live and move.
No Stagge in chase so thirsty is,
or greedy of sweet spring
As is my soul of *thee* my *God*...³¹

It seems that for both Julian and Dame Gertrude divine love is something unattainable

in life. One can only aspire to it, and look forward to receiving the blessing of it in death. For mystics such as Julian and Gertrude death represented the quintessence of their mysticism. Julian looks forward to death as a means of embracing the divine. "I desired", she tells her reader, "to have all manner of Paines, Bodilie and Ghostlie, that I should have if I should have died [...] for I desired to have bene soone with my *God* and *Maker*" (*Revelations*, p.5). Similarly, Gertrude writes:

My hart shall only this desire,
That *thou* my Lord *dispose*.
E'en as *thou* pleasest in all things,
Till these myne eyes thou close
By death, which I so much desire,... (Swan Song)

In death Gertrude affirms that the mystic will be "United by a knott of Love / Which nothing shall unity [untie]". Julian explains that union can only really occur in death owing to Christ's initial sacrifice. Since, claims Julian, "our *Lord Jesu* Pained for us, [...] we stand all in this manner of Pain with him, and shall do till that we come to his bliss" (*Revelations*, p.47) Thus, the wound in his side becomes "a fair delectable place" which Christ shows her in her tenth vision, in which he professes his love for her:

My Darling, behold and see thy Lord, [...] thy Maker, [...] and see that I loved thee so much, or that I died for thee, that I would die for thee. And now I have died for thee, [...] my liking is thy holiness, and the endless joy and bliss with me.' (*Revelations*, pp.58-9)

The originality of Julian's writing is located in the sensualised relationship with Christ which constitutes the basis of her theology. Julian's fundamental sensualism clearly finds a parallel in Dame Gertrude's poetry as both mystics seem to imagine the ecstatic union of a bride and bridegroom.

It has been pointed out that there are also echoes of Julian of Norwich in the writings of another English recusant, Mary Ward (1585-1645).³² Although she eventually formed her own rather radical order, Mary Ward was connected with the

Benedictines through her cousin, Lady Mary Percy, who was the English Benedictine Superior at Brussels and who had helped to form the new foundation at Cambrai. Ward devoted her life to teaching her mystical learning, believing it was God's intention that she convert as many as possible to the Catholic faith. In 1609 she recorded a vision in which God communicated to her that she must not live as a recluse:

...whilst I adorned my head at the mirror, something very supernatural befell me, [...] I was abstracted out of my whole being, and it was shown to me with clearness and inexpressible certainty that I was not to be of the Order of St. Teresa, but that some other thing was determined for me, without all comparison more to the glory of God than my entrance into that holy religion.³³

This "supernatural" experience formed one of three revelations in which Ward learned that her vocation was to teach and convert. In 1616 Mary Ward wrote to Pope Paul V asking to labour disguised in Protestant England as a part of the Catholic underground movement. Her desire was to preach her mystical beliefs, and Mary Ward was so eager to convert others to her belief that she and her fellow nuns became notorious as the "galloping girls". The Reverend William Harrison complained in 1621 that "They are a great shame and disgrace to the Catholic Religion [...] as if England could not be converted without them [...] They wander hither and thither at will against modesty [as] They cross back and forth from England to Belgium".³⁴ Mary Ward and her followers crossed "back and forth from England to Belgium" in order to found educational institutes, specifically for "the education of girls".³⁵ In the first plan of her "School of the Blessed Mary", Ward writes that "Since the very distressed condition of England, our native land, is greatly in need of spiritual workers, [...] so it seems right that, according to their condition, women also should and can provide something more than ordinary in the face of the common need" (*Till God Will*, p.34). The convents at both Cambrai and Paris were well known centres of writing, translating, and for the preservation of books and manuscripts, and their aim was clearly to maintain the Catholic mystical tradition.

However, their method was largely insular, whereas Mary Ward was determined to be more cosmopolitan. In an effort to convert English Protestants as well as seeking the support of existing Catholics, she ensured that the "best" of the Catholic mystical tradition was taught at home in her "native land".

The Protestant Tradition

The evidence thus far points to the probability that within the Catholic tradition the writings of medieval women mystics continued to influence later women writers. But to what extent did strands from the Catholic tradition of mystical writing cross over into the work of Protestant writers? There is evidence of specific Protestant ownership of Catholic mystical texts, found in the private libraries of scholars and the aristocracy.³⁶ Thomas à Kempis's work, *The Imitation of Christ* was the most popular Catholic mystical text. There were more than forty-five editions in print before 1700, of which over a dozen of them were Protestant versions.³⁷ Also, the correspondence between educated English women such as Bathsua Makin, tutor to the daughters of Charles I, and Gertrude More with Anna Maria van Schurman points to a contemporary exchange of knowledge and opinions which crosses the religious divide.³⁸ Indeed Makin de-emphasised differences of religion in order to emphasise the achievement of women per se. In *An Essay To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673) Bathsua Makin informs her reader, for example, that the mystic who once sought the advice of Hildegard of Bingen, "*Elizabetha of Schonaugia* [...] writ many things in the Latin Tongue; namely, a Book intituled *A Path to direct us the way to God*; as also a Volumn[e] of Learned Epistles; with many other Books".³⁹ Like Mary Ward, Makin's primary concern was to improve female education, and *An Essay To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* was written to advertise her school 'lately erected for Gentlewomen at *Tottenham-high-Cross*' (Essay, p.42). Makin did not therefore

discriminate between writing by Catholic and Protestant women, evaluating the writings of all 'learned women' equally.

Obviously, especially during the civil war period, it was not only gentlewomen who were able to gauge the significance of Catholic texts. Relaxation of censorship ensured the proliferation of popular religious books which, according to Margaret Spufford demonstrated the close relationship between Protestant and Catholic texts and their importance to "non-gentle parishioners".⁴⁰ Combined with this was a long tradition of 'catalogues of women', going back, at least, to Plutarch, celebrating the achievements of women across the centuries. In 1651 Charles Gerbier compiled *Elogium Heroinum: Or, The Praise of Worthy Women* which contained among other things, the "manifest Prophecies" of the "Sybils", and accounts of Christine de Pisan, "Margaret of Vallois, Queen of Navarre, and 'Anna Maria Schurmans". Another such tract, entitled *Female Pre-eminence* claims that the female sex is "Famous for Prophetie [...] amongst all Nations; witness Cassandra; all the Sybils; [...] and others of old; besides divers more modern, as St. Bridget, Hildegard, &c."⁴¹ As yet another example demonstrates, Samuel Torshell's *The Woman's Glorie* (1650), these texts repeat the pattern of Agrippa's *A Treatise on the nobilitie of woman kind* which was reprinted twice in 1652. Indeed, Diane Wood points to the popularity of Agrippa's text, particularly with female readers of the 1530s and 40s. Published for the first time twenty years after it was written in 1509, *A Treatise on the nobilitie of woman kind* enumerates the superior qualities of women and includes a catalogue of famous women from antiquity and the Bible who exemplified these qualities.⁴²

Alongside a generalised interest in prophecy and Catholic texts, there was a deliberate appropriation of the Catholic tradition by Protestants, exemplified by John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, or the *Book of Martyrs*, as it was referred to by Fifth Monarchists Henry Jessey and John Rogers,

became canonical in 1571, when Convocation decreed that "Every Archbishop and bishop shall have in hys house *The holy Bible* in the largest volume, as it was lately printed at London, and also that full and perfect history, which is intituled *Monumentes of Martyres*."⁴³ Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* is a martyrology for the English Protestant church. The catalyst for the first edition of the *Acts and Monuments of these latter and perillous dayes* (1563) was undoubtedly the Marian persecutions, although Foxe was also concerned to present, and indeed was credited with providing, a "true" account of the history of the church in order to expose the intrinsic corruption of Catholicism.⁴⁴ All "this Catholicke corruption", wrote Foxe, amounts to "new nothings lately coyned out of the minte of Rome, without any stampe of antiquitie".⁴⁵ For Foxe the Protestant church was the reformed Catholic church. He thus "Gathered and collected" his material from authentic church sources, "according to the true copies & wrytinges certificatorie as wel of the parties them selves that suffered, as also out of the Bishops Registers, which wer the doers thereof".⁴⁶ His method ensured that his Protestant readers became familiar with the practices of Catholic saints such as "Hildegard and Briget, [...] for their songs and prophetical verses".⁴⁷ Throughout his *Book of Martyrs* Foxe incorporated detailed accounts of the rules of both these saints as well as their prophecies, thus appropriating in some measure the Catholic tradition for a Protestant readership. Throughout *Acts and Monuments* there are six references to St. Bridget and eleven references to St. Hildegard which give detailed accounts of their prophecies.

Hildegard of Bingen interested Foxe primarily because she "prophesieth of the reformation of religion, and saith that it shall be most godly." According to Foxe, this "true prophetess" declared that the reformation "shall partly come to pass by incursion of wars, and partly, also, by a common council and consent of the spiritual and secular persons. Then shall justice flourish".⁴⁸ He then presents the whole prophecy, "reciting her words, not only as they are in a book printed lately in Germany, but also, as myself

have seen and read, and still have the same to show written in old parchment leaves, agreeing to the same book word for word" (*Acts and Monuments*, vol.2, p.354). Foxe was obviously a diligent student of Hildegard's work and seems concerned to present her "words" as accurately as possible. He thus relates to his readers Hildegard's prophecy against "friars and monks", in which she claims that

the devil will graft in them four principal vices; that is to say, flattery, envy, hypocrisy, and backbiting [...] Also they shall instantly preach, but without devotion or example of the martyrs; and shall report evil of secular princes, taking away the sacraments of the church from the true pastors, receiving alms of the poor, diseased, and miserable; and also associating themselves with the common people, [and] having familiarity with women (*Acts and Monuments*, vol.2, p.355).

It seems clear that Foxe recognised the need for reform in Hildegard's depiction of the debased immorality of those representatives of papal power. He probably also appreciated Hildegard's prediction that they would "fall"

...even as Simon Magus, whom God overthrew, and did strike with a cruel plague; so you, likewise, through your false doctrine, naughtiness, lies, detractions and wickedness, are come to ruin.' (*Acts and Monuments*, vol.2, p.355)

If these professed members of the "apostolical order" continue unreformed, Hildegard foresees not only their doom, but, as Foxe puts it, "the ruin of Rome". For Hildegard's visionary experience has shown her that "by the just judgement of God, you are fallen back into perpetual opprobrium and shame" (*Acts and Monuments*, vol.2, p.355). Foxe associates the apocalyptic nature of Hildegard's prophecy with the prophecies of Erythrea Sibylla of Christ and St. Bridget.

The "book" of Erythrea Sibylla's prophecies was, Foxe tells us, "found in St. George's church in Venice".⁴⁹ In contrast to Hildegard, Erythrea Sibylla speaks more generally of the "days" that "shall come, when the power of the flowing stream shall be magnified in water, and the lion, the monarch, shall be converted to the lamb, which

shall shine to all men, and subvert kingdoms."

Foxe quotes a crucial passage wherein "Briget prophesieth of reformation":

Rome shall be scoured and purged with three things - with sword, fire, and the plough. Resembling, moreover, the said church of Rome to a plant removed out of the old place into a new: also to a body condemned by a judge to have the skin flayed off; the blood to be drawn from the flesh; the flesh to be cut out in pieces; and the bones thereof to be broken; and all the marrow to be squeezed out from the same; so that no part thereof remain whole and perfect, (*Acts and Monuments*, vol.4, p.255).

The violence of St. Bridget's imagery suits the generally gruesome tone of Foxe's entire text, and the prophecy is repeated twice in the fourth volume. Although Foxe's declaration that "to these speculations of Briget I give no respect", suggests a certain contempt for her work, he also venerates her as the "holy St. Bridget, whom the church of Rome hath canonized not only for a saint, but also for a prophetess; who, notwithstanding, in her book of Revelations, which hath been oftentimes imprinted, was a great rebuker of the pope and of the filth of his clergy" (*Acts and Monuments*, vol.4, p255; vol.2, p.777). However we may explain Foxe's contradictory approach to St. Bridget, he seems to accept the judgement of the Catholic church in proclaiming such prophetesses saints. For, speaking of "Katharine of Sienna", Foxe writes,

Of the authority of this prophetess I have not to affirm or adjudge, but rather to hear what the catholic judges will say of this their own saint and prophet. For if they do not credit her spirit of prophecy, why then do they authorize her for a pure saint among the sisters of dear St. Dominic? If they warrant her prophecy, let them say then, When was this glorious reformation of the church ever true or like to be true, if it be not true now, in this marvellous alteration of the church in these latter days? (*Acts and Monuments*, vol.4, p.256)

It is evident that Foxe used the dictates of the Catholic church against itself in order to facilitate his own political agenda. By accepting the judgement of the Catholic church in authorising women like St. Bridget and Katharine he can then cite their prophecies which declared that the pope was, as Foxe puts it, "worse than Lucifer himself" (*Acts*

and Monuments, vol.2, p.777). Ultimately, Foxe's inclusion of these prophecies in his canonical text gave the words of these Catholic saints the distinction of Protestant orthodoxy.

With the printing of the eighth edition of *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe* in 1641, the apocalyptic prophecies of Erythrea Sibylla, St. Bridget and Hildegard of Bingen, coincided with the intensification of millenarian ideas generated by the English Civil War. St. Bridget's affirmation "that the prelates, bishops, and priests, are the cause why the doctrine of Christ is neglected" must have struck a chord with the growing Fifth Monarchy movement; particularly as her belief that "the clergy have turned the ten commandments of God into two words, to wit. 'Da Pecuniam,' that is 'Give money' ", found a parallel in the Fifth Monarchist concern over church tithes which John Rogers described as "a *Publick evil* ... (for they are an oppression to) *the People*".⁴⁷ Certainly, Fifth Monarchists used Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* as a source-book. John Rogers, for example, cited *Acts and Monuments* to support his call for church reform, and Henry Jessey was a professed believer in the political relevance of prophetic experience because, as he says, "M^r Fox in the *Book of Martyrs*, cites many *Miracles* wrought, and *Prophecies* uttered both in the *first hundred* of yeers after the Apostles, and in the *second, third, fourth, fifth*, and so on to his time."⁵⁰

The importance of *Acts and Monuments* to Fifth Monarchist writers is evident, but the actual impact of female prophecy on their ideas and beliefs is an area which has received little critical attention. The title page of Rogers's *Sagrir* claims that his main aim was to attack "the *present* ungodly *Laws* and *Lawyers* of the *Fourth Monarchy*", and to herald the "approach of the *FIFTH*", and he reinforced this with several references to "many *old Prophecies* of these daies, as in the *Oracles* of the *Sibyls*" (*Sagrir*, p.131). Rogers used the several female prophets of ancient Rome, Greece, Babylon, and Egypt, to typify the apocalyptic prophecies which predicted that "Christ alone shall be

the King, and shall deliver his Subjects that have been captives under other Kings and Emperors; and then shall there be good Laws and Religion" (*Sagrir*, p.131). As he continued to affirm: "I could heap up many more Prophecies and Predictions of this nature", he demonstrated his familiarity with an abundance of prophetic evidence to support his argument; and of course for someone like Rogers, Foxe's text was a mine of source material. Rogers' use of women's visionary experience is highly suggestive of the fact that it was accepted as authoritative. Certainly, Foxe's various accounts of female prophecy in *Acts and Monuments* validated their words.

As popular as Foxe's text remained in the mid-seventeenth century, it was not the only body of Protestant theology to incorporate the words of women mystics. Another leading sixteenth-century writer to appropriate the Catholic tradition for Protestants was the German mystic and philosopher Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). Nigel Smith points out that of "all the continental spiritualists to influence the radical sectarians during the middle years of the seventeenth century, Jacob Boehme has been most talked about" as his work is widely acknowledged to appeal to "mystics, spiritualists and occultists alike".⁵¹ It is also widely acknowledged that, like Foxe, Boehme's work was strongly influenced by the writings of St. Hildegard.⁵² For instance, as Barbara Newman has noted, Hildegard was concerned primarily with "the mystery of creation, the bond between Creator and creature [and with] the deep resonance of the macrocosm with the microcosm".⁵³ Hildegard was drawn to the Old Testament wisdom literature, consisting of several of Proverbs (especially 8: 22-31), Ecclesiastes, together with Ecclesiasticus, the Wisdom of Solomon (see 2:13,16), and several of the Psalms (see 37), which personified Wisdom, or Sophia, in the works of creation. Since Wisdom "is the splendor of the eternal light, / and immaculate mirror of God's majesty, / And image of his goodness" (Wis. 7:26), for Hildegard, Wisdom represented the providence of God and the activity of the cosmos; hence we learn that Wisdom stands on a platform

supported by seven pillars, proclaims her royalty and "reverently folds her hands before her breast: this is the power that Wisdom sagely binds to herself, directing all her work so that none can resist her at all, neither by cunning or by force".⁵⁴ In this instance, Hildegard's visions show the created world as a reflection, or "mirror of God's majesty". Similarly Boehme wrote that Wisdom was "the *mother* of the light'

for the flash generateth the light, and is the Father of the fierceness, for the fierceness abideth in the flash as a seed in the Father, and that flash generateth also the Tone or Sound.⁵⁵

Nigel Smith has argued that, for Boehme, this demonstrates God's self-reflection in the mirror of Wisdom or Sophia.⁵⁶ The potent image of Wisdom's inherent "fierceness" as she glories in her procreative power also illustrates Hildegard's point that she is literally irresistible. Her very essence is, as Boehme puts it, "the Mobility boyling springing and driving of a thing" (*Aurora*, p.34). Both Hildegard and Boehme recognise her ability to penetrate, what Smith has described as "outer and inner knowledge, nature and the human soul".⁵⁷ But nature has the potential to be both good and evil, since in the external world nature signifies the fallen state. And for both of these visionary writers humanity is a mirror which reflects the entire cosmos.⁵⁸ Indeed, Hildegard's particular theosophy has ensured her identification as "the instigator of the flowering of German mysticism".⁵⁹ German mysticism (*deutsche Mystik*), is a term that was coined by Karl Rosenkranz, a disciple of Hegel, and was intended to suggest that the great achievements of German philosophy formed a continuous line, originating with medieval mysticism.⁶⁰

Sectarian interest in Boehme's work in the mid-seventeenth century can be gauged by the number of printed translations which abounded in England at this time. Like the Fifth Monarchists, Boehme held millenarian beliefs, consequently his work found many admirers among Fifth Monarchists, especially after their translation into

English.⁶¹ Boehme's work was printed posthumously in England from 1647 to 1691, and of the twenty-nine tracts listed in the *Short Title Catalogue*, twenty were printed and sold by those, such as Matthew Simmons and Giles Calvert, known to be connected to the Fifth Monarchist movement.⁶² This associates the work of Boehme with the work of other Fifth Monarchists, such as Mary Cary, Elizabeth Avery, Sarah Wight, and John Rogers, who used the same printers.⁶³ And indeed, the Welsh Fifth Monarchist Morgan Llwyd is acknowledged to be directly influenced by Jacob Boehme, and translated two of Boehme's works from English into Welsh. Llwyd was certainly associated with the London Fifth Monarchists and is included in Henry Jessey's list of the visitors to Sarah Wight during her trance.⁶⁴ With the work of Jacob Boehme, the German mysticism initiated by Hildegard bloomed and flourished, arriving in England in the mid-seventeenth century, and travelling across the Atlantic with the Protestant mystic and founder of the Philadelphian sect, Jane Lead, a known disciple of Jacob Boehme.

The Impact of the Mystical Tradition on the Fifth Monarchists

The works of both Boehme and Foxe were suited to the sectarian culture of Civil War England where those belonging to extreme political movements, like the Fifth Monarchists, rigidly adhered to the beliefs of their given sect. Since each sect claimed divine inspiration and authorisation, the special pertinence of these two writers was perhaps due to the fact that they demonstrated the applicability of God's word to the individual. The title of one of Boehme's works, for example, was translated in 1644 as *The Tree of Christian Faith: Being a True Information, how a Man may be one Spirit with God, and what Man must do to perform the works of God: In which is comprehended (compendiously) the whole Christian Doctrine and Faith*. Given the apparent association of Boehme's works with the Fifth Monarchists, Mary Cary's claim that "all Saints have in a measure a spirit of Prophetie"⁶⁵ is especially significant. Not

only does it suggest that the individual 'saint' is infused with the 'spirit of God', she also celebrates her own knowledge of God by publishing her interpretation of the Scriptures, thereby performing the works of God. She positioned herself as a prophet, as the term was "ordinarily understood" to mean those "great preachers and publishers of Gospell-truths" (*New Jerusalem's Glory*, p.106). Thus she proclaimed that "all saints might be satisfied, though they be not so eminently gifted as others are [...] all Saints, from the most eminent Prophet, and Teacher, to the meanest and tenderest babe, that waites upon, and loves, and feares the Lord Jesus, shall be rewarded at his coming" (*New Jerusalem's Glory*, pp.106-07).

It seems clear that certain aspects of mysticism fit with the beliefs of Fifth Monarchists, and there is evidence of specific Fifth Monarchist use of medieval texts. In *Ohel* John Rogers referred to the teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux. Rogers, discussing the equality of women and men in the church, wrote: "*Bernard in lib. de gratia & liv. arbit.* tels us of a threefold liberty, *i.e.* of *nature*, *grace* and *glory*, and every woman (as well as man) is made happy by it, [...] in his *Catholick Epistle* (so call'd) saies it agrees not with the profession to make difference of persons in the *Church of Christ*" (*Ohel*, p.472, see also p.473). Emphasising the worth of the individual regardless of gender, Rogers cited St. Bernard in order to promote sexual equality in the church. He also declared that he had "read in *Jerom's* daies of many holy women that exceeded others in learning and abilities, and in the studying of the *Scriptures*, and they had their *Commentaries* upon them of their own *making*" (*Ohel*, p.474). In *Sagrir* Rogers quotes at length from one of Hildegard's prophecies. In a chapter promising "Doomes-day to LAWYERS" in which he demonstrates how "the Lawyers are Antichrists State-Army of Locusts", Rogers writes:

Concerning Locusts, Hildegard hath a prophecy, which is, *In those days shall arise a sort of blockish Fellows, proud, covetous, perfideous, and crafty, eating upon the sins of the people, preferring themselves before other Men, of arrogant disposition, and voide of all shame or feare of God, in inventing new mischeifes, strong and stout; but all prudent men and faithfull Christians shall curse this pestilent order.*

"[W]hilst", continues Rogers, "we have offered these considerations of the *Locusts*, wee doe not exclude a more *spirituall* and refined meaning of those words in the full sence of them." (*Sagrir*, pp.29-30) Though Rogers is primarily concerned with the physical necessities of "their [the lawyers] *power to torment*", and to incite revolutionary fervour with his words: "and a *West wind* will remove them our of those places wherein they have sat, and sung, and plagued us", he is still sensitive to Hildegard's spiritual message: "*Woo be to you miserable wretches! that are ordained to sorrow! the devill has guided you! your heart is without grace [...] your eye is blinded with vanity and folly!*" (*Sagrir*, p.29). The prophecy quoted by Rogers in *Sagrir* is close to one of those cited in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, which begins: "In those days there shall rise up a people without understanding, proud, covetous, untrusty, and deceitful, that shall eat the sins of the people, [...] preferring themselves above all others" (*Acts and Monuments*, vol. 3 p.87). Since the prophecy is not identical it is equally likely that Rogers used another source, but whichever source he used he is clearly influenced by the words of Hildegard and the "many holy women" he has knowledge of.⁶⁶

Did Hildegard's words reach other Fifth Monarchists? We know that Anna Trapnel was proud of her education since she made a point of the fact that she was "trained up in my book and writing", although we can only speculate as to what texts she actually read (*Cry*, p.3). Certainly, the publication of Hildegard's prophecy in his 1654 text, *Sagrir*, meant that some of her writing was widely available, and it is possible that Rogers personally communicated his knowledge of medieval women mystics to Trapnel and others. There is evidence that Trapnel and Rogers did communicate with

each other. While in prison Rogers reports receiving "A Message brought me the 10 of this month by our S[ister]: H.T." ⁶⁷

Assessing the medieval influences on the work of Anna Trapnel is more difficult than with John Rogers, since, unlike Rogers' specific references to medieval mystical writers, Anna Trapnel wrote more generally. In *A Legacy for Saints*, for instance, Trapnel professed feelings of affinity with those of the old Catholic faith, when she wrote that although

perswaded that bare Professors are the greatest Papists in the world; [...] my experience teacheth me, that one may be a great worshipper of Idols, and yet never bow down to a picture: But oh when the Lord took away my gods, how I lamented! and the more spirituall my company was in their discourse, the more stony hearted I was: I could freely speak to those that lived under an old administration, my spirit being under the same. ⁶⁸

Here Trapnel almost seems to ally herself with the Catholic tradition as she was unable to communicate with her fellow Puritans whose company was "burdensome" to her, and who failed to understand the extent of her religious fervour and "were affrighted to see" her (*Legacy*, p.4).

John Rogers specifically utilised the writings of those mystics who remained prominent within the Catholic tradition. For example, he recalled some of St. Bernard's comments on the issue of justice, stating that St. Bernard wrote "an *Epistle* to the Pope *Eugenius*, who condemned many, and delivered them up to *secular Powers* to be put to death, [...] I read *that the Apostles stood to be judged, but I never read, that they sate as Judges to sentence any*". So it seems that Rogers, like St. Bernard before him, followed the Christian tradition in which Christ and the Apostles epitomise love and forgiveness. "But", continued Rogers,

this shall be (for the Saints shall judge the world) and judge their Judges that now deliver them up to be murdered and massacred. This wee shall finde long agoe the Saints were well acquainted with. A good woman, Mistress Askew, Martyr in King Henry the eighths dayes, said to Wrisley (the Lord Chancellor) I have searched the Scriptures all over, but I cannot finde that ever Christ, or any of his

Apostles put any to death though Hereticks, or delivered them up to others to put them to death' (Ohe!, pp.177-78).

By preaching the experiences of Saints and Protestant Martyrs, Rogers was following the structure of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Rogers plainly shared the beliefs of fellow Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary who wrote that Christ "will freely give [the Saints] a glorious reward, for all that they have suffered and done for him." For now, continued Cary, is "the time in which he comes to do righteousness and justice in the earth" (*New Jerusalem's Glory*, p.107). Being "A declaration of Revelations, or the unfoldings of God to the soul in visions of glory", Trapnel's *Legacy for Saints* also corroborated the idea that because the Saints, or Fifth Monarchists were divinely authorised, they were morally correct in assuming the position of judges to the rest of the world (*Legacy*, p.43). Manifestly, the approach these Fifth Monarchists took to their writing echoed the combined beliefs of Hildegard and Boehme, while the structure of their work echoed that of Foxe.

Despite claims by such critics as Diane Watt that the long term influence of female prophecy was limited, the strong mystical element in seventeenth-century English millenarianism, exemplified by the Fifth Monarchists, John Rogers, Anna Trapnel and Mary Cary, seems to indicate the opposite.⁶⁹ Since the Fifth Monarchists demonstrated their awareness of medieval mystical texts by using them to further their ideological beliefs, this study testifies to the fact that the traditionally Catholic views of medieval mystical writers were absorbed into Puritan politics. Critics have been ambivalent towards the idea that later women writers participated consciously in a tradition of female prophecy and mysticism. Believing that it is "entirely possible that Margery Kempe's reputation survived into the sixteenth century, Diane Watt, for example, nevertheless warns that if Kempe "had a more long term influence than is generally recognized", the same can hardly be said for other women visionaries.⁶⁸ She

claims that if they were remembered at all "they were remembered in recusant and Protestant circles respectively."⁷⁰ Yet Watt does make reference to the fact that it was Anne Askew's "incorporation into Foxes *Acts and Monuments* alongside the *narratives of other godly women* that ensured its survival in the ensuing centuries."⁷² As we have seen Foxe's text was greatly responsible for effectively carrying the words of Catholic writers, such as Hildegard of Bingen and St. Bridget, as well as Protestant martyrs through to the seventeenth century, enabling us to realise that these women were not only remembered, but that their words and ideas were still seen to be relevant in the 1650s.

NOTES

- 1 Diane Watt does acknowledge that "[s]imilarities" in the "discourse" of seventeenth-century women visionaries and "that of earlier women prophets may be explained in part by the influence of contemporary Catholicism and residual elements of medieval prophecy and vision", though she remains undecided about the actual long term influence. See Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), pp.3, 5, 155-63.

- 2 Indeed Gerda Lerner emphasises the enduring influence of Hildegard, whom she identifies as a pioneer in combining spirituality, moral authority and public activism to create what was to become a new public role model for women. She notes that Hildegard's writings were not only influential and widely circulated in her own lifetime, they were also published in 1533 and 1544, and her influence has been traced as far as the seventeenth century with two publications of *A Nun's Prophesie*. Lerner also affirms that Hildegard's work and life reveal some of the major tensions, conflicts and strength that characterise the lives and work of later female thinkers. She wished to be seen in the act of writing down her visions, in the act of authorship. And wishing to be remembered in her own right, she became the first female inspired by mystical revelation to claim her place in history.) Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of a Feminist Consciousness From the Middle Ages to 1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.57, 275.

- 3 See Vicki Collins, 'Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers: Rhetorical Functions of a Methodist Mystic's Journal' in Christine Mason Sutherland and Rebecca Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Changing Tradition: Women and the History of Rhetoric* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1999), pp.109-118.

- 4 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London: Duckworth, 1975), p.192.

- 5 Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.45.

- 6 Smith notes that "Propheying and experience were brought together in the gathered churches most closely through several pamphlets which recounted, in part in their own words, the experiences of several women prophets, the most important of whom were Sarah Wight and Anna Trapnel." See Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p.45.

- 7 Re-prints of Bernard of Clairvaux's works include, for example, *Saint Bernards vision* (c.1640) STC 1910; *Herafter foloweth an epistle of Saynt Bernarde called the golden epistle. Than after folowe four revelations of St. Birget* [1531?] STC 1915; *Medytacons of saynt Bernarde* (1496) STC 1916; *A Looking Glass* (1685) Wing B1980A; *A Mirror that Flatters not* (1677) Wing B1981, anr. ed. B1982; and *Saint Bernard's vision* (1683) Wing B1982B. There were twenty editions of Thomas à Kempis's *The Christian's Pattern: A Divine Treatise of the imitation of Christ* between 1642 and 1699. See, for example, *The Christian's Pattern* (1642) Wing T939B. See also David Crane, 'English Translations of the *Imitatio Christi*'

in *Recusant History* 13 (1976) pp.79-100.

- 8 See Paul Strauss, *In Hope of Heaven: English Recusant Prison Writings of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p.23. See also F. Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1992), pp.109-129.
- 9 See *A Spiritual Consolation, Written by John Fysshier To His Sister* (1578) STC 10899.
- 10 Hildegard was voted one of *The Guardian's* top ten women of the Millennium, see *The Guardian* Monday 25th January 1999. And on March 20th 1998 *The Guardian* ran an article on "the best-known medieval composer and probably the most famous medieval woman", Hildegard of Bingen, marking the ninth centenary of her birth and pointing out that virtually every classical music shop has a collection of compact discs devoted to her extraordinary, passionate and obsessive chants (Christopher Page, 'Divine Invention' in *The Guardian* Friday March 20th 1998), p.17.
- 11 See Joseph L Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (eds.), *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen Volume 1* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), which points out the especial significance of the Pope's blessing, p.32. Hereafter cited in the text as *Letters*.
- 12 See Frances Beer, *Julian of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love: The Shorter Version Edited From B.L. Add. 37790* (Heidelberg: Middle English Texts 8, 1978); Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* 2 Vols. Studies and Texts 34 and 35 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978); Alexandra Barratt, 'How Many Children had Julian of Norwich? Editions, Translations and Versions of her Revelations' in Anne Clark Bartlett with Thomas H. Bestul, Janet Goebel and William F. Pollard (eds.), *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1995), pp.27-39, and Marion Glasscoe, 'Visions and Revisions: A Further Look at the Manuscripts of Julian of Norwich' in *Studies in Bibliography* 42 (1989), pp.103-120.
- 13 See Barratt, 'How Many Children had Julian of Norwich?', p.27.
- 14 Marion Glasscoe thinks it is late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, see 'Visions and Revisions', p.105; whereas Colledge and Walsh believe it to date from the mid-seventeenth century, see *A Book of Showings Part One: Introduction and Short Text*, p.7.
- 15 See Dorothy Latz, *"Glow Worm Light": Writings of Seventeenth-Century English Recusant Women from Original Manuscripts* Salzburg Studies in English Literature (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1989), pp.17-18.
- 16 See Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings: Part One: Introduction and the Short Text*, p.8; and Barratt, 'How Many Children had Julian of Norwich?', p.28. There is some disparity over the date of Anne Cary's death, Colledge and Walsh

think it is 1671, whereas Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson believe it was 1693: see the editorial notes of Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson in Weller and Ferguson (eds.), *The Tragedy of Mariam the Fair Queen of Jewry with The Lady Falkland Her Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994), p.180. They also note that Anne was received into the convent at Cambrai in 1639, as 'Clementia', and corroborate the fact that she transcribed "the most authoritative extant MS of the *Revelation* of Julian of Norwich", p.1. See also Donald Foster, 'Resurrecting the Author: Elizabeth Tanfield Cary' in Jean Brink (ed.), *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England* (Kirkville, MO.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publications, 1993).

- 17 See Dorothy Latz, *Glow Worm Light*, p.11.
- 18 Ibid., p.18.
- 19 See Ann M. Hutchinson, 'Three (Recusant) Sisters' in Clark Bartlett et al., *Vox Mystica*, pp.147-58.
- 20 See F.R. Johnston, 'The English Cult of St. Bridget of Sweden' in *Analecta Bollandiana* 103 (1985), pp.75-93, pp.90,93, which cites the earliest examples of this: Pynson's Calender of the New Legen in 1516. De Word pictured in his edition of the *Horae* in 1519 and Fawkes in the *Mirror of Our Lady*, and Treveris in his edition of Whytford's Werke for Householders.
- 21 See Johnston, 'English Cult of St. Bridget', pp.90-1.
- 22 See Antony F. Allison and David M. Rogers, *A Catalogue of Catholic Books in English, Printed Abroad or Secretly in England 1158-1640* (London: William Dawson & Sons, 1968).
- 23 The *Prayers* are dated 1653, but the collection was probably printed around 1664, St. Bridget's work is bound with Louis Blossius and George Layburn, and also includes extracts from 'the life of B. Angela of Fulginio'.
- 24 See James Hogg, 'St Birgitta's *Revelations* reduced to a Book of Pious Instruction' in Clark Bartlett et al., *Vox Mystica*, pp.201-229, pp.225-6.
- 25 See Latz, *Glow Worm Light*, p.18.
- 26 See Mary E. Giles, 'The Feminist Mystic' in Mary E. Giles (ed.), *The Feminist Mystic and Other Essays on Women and Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp.6-38.
- 27 From *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More*, quoted in Margaret Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p.69.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.

- 30 See D. Latz, 'The Mystical Poetry of Dame Gertrude More' in *Mystics Quarterly* 16 (1990), p.66-82, pp.68-70.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 See the selection of Mary Ward's work in *Till God Will: Mary Ward Through Her Writings*. Both Walsh, who has translated *The Revelations of Divine Love of Julian of Norwich* (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke Books, 1980) and edited *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), and M. Emmanuel Orchard note several points of similarity between Julian of Norwich's *Showings* and Mary Ward's writing. See M. Emmanuel Orchard (ed.), with introduction by James Walsh, *Till God Will* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985) pp.xi, xxxii, xxviii, xxxi, 24, 27, 40, 41, 43, 47, 56.
- 33 This quotation is taken from Mary Ward's *Autobiographical Papers* (1617-26) in Randall Martin (ed.), *Women Writers in Renaissance England* (London: Longman, 1997), pp.228-44, p.241.
- 34 See Letter of Rev. William Harrison and others, 1621, Vatican Library, Fondo Capponiano 47, 1620-22, ff. 68r.-72v. quoted in Latz, *Glow-Worm Light* p.150.
- 35 *Till God Will*, p.44, hereafter cited in the text as *Till God Will*.
- 36 See, for example, R.J. Fehrenbach, and E.S. Leedham-Green, (eds.), *Private Libraries in Renaissance England, A Collection of Tudor and Early Stuart Book-Lists* (Binghampton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995).
- 37 See Marion Norman, 'Gertrude More and the English Mystical Tradition' in *Recusant History* 13 (1975-6), pp.196-211, who also points out that Puritans like Fielding's heroine Clarissa Harlowe owned, and presumably read, Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*.
- 38 See Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife*, p.82 and J.R. Brink, 'Bathsua Makin: Educator and Linguist' in J.R. Brink (ed.), *Female Scholars: A Tradition of Learned Women Before 1800* (Montreal and Vermont: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1980), pp.86-100, especially p.89.
- 39 Bathsua Makin, *An Essay To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673) Wing M309, pp.10-11. Hereafter cited in the text as *Essay*.
- 40 See Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1981), pp.194-218, especially p.208.
- 41 Charles Gerbier, *Elogium Heroinum: Or, The Praise of Worthy Women* (1651) Wing G583, pp.35-38, 40, 43, 44; Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Female Pre-eminence: Or the Dignity and Excellency of the Sex, above the Male* (1670) Wing A784.

- 42 Diane S. Wood, 'In Praise of Women's Superiority: Heinrich Cornelius Aprippa's *De nobilitate* (1529)' in Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, Charles Platter (eds.), *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp.189-206, p.190.
- 43 Quoted in Jesse Lander, ' "Foxe's" *Books of Martyrs*: Printing and Popularising the *Acts and Monuments*' in Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (eds.), *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.69-92, p.69.
- 44 Tom Betteridge, 'From Prophetic to Apocalyptic: John Foxe and the Writing of History' in David Loades (ed.), *John Foxe and the English Reformation* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), pp.210-32.
- 45 From the introduction to 'The First Volume of the Ecclesiasticall history contayning the Actes and Monuments' in John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of these latter and perillous dayes, touching matters of the church* (1563) STC 11222.
- 46 Ibid., this quotation is taken from the title-page.
- 47 Rev. Josiah Pratt (ed.), *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1877), vol.4, p.114. Hereafter cited as *Acts and Monuments*.
- 48 *Acts and Monuments*, vol.2, p.354. The prophecy against bishops is repeated in volume 3, see pp.86-88.
- 49 *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 2, pp.777-9, John Rogers, *Sagrir, or Doomes-day drawing nigh* (1654) Wing R1814, p.15. Hereafter cited in the text as *Sagrir*.
- 50 See John Rogers, *Ohel, or Beth-shemesh. A Tabernacle for the Sun* (1653) Wing R1813, p.284; and Henry Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced* (1647) Wing J687, p.140.
- 51 Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p.185.
- 52 See Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: State Univ. of N.Y. Press, 1991), and Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstien* (Albany: State Univ. of N.Y. Press, 1993).
- 53 Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, LA & London: University of California Press, 1987), p.44.
- 54 From *Scivias* III 9.25, pp.538-39 quoted in Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp.48-9.
- 55 Jacob Boehme, *Aurora. That is, the Day-Spring* (1656) Wing B3397, p.188. Hereafter cited in the text as *Aurora*.
- 56 See Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p.202.

- 57 Ibid.
- 58 For a review of the intricacies of the views of Hildegard on Adam and Eve see Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp.89-120, and on Boehme see Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp.195-205. Both writers identify certain principles, including Sophia or Wisdom, which explain the Fall in terms of microcosm and macrocosm, as parts of the human body correspond with certain spiritual values.
- 59 Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1992).
- 60 See Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism*, p.1.
- 61 See Bernard Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp.37,185, and Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed* p.185.
- 62 These are: *An Apologie Concerning Perfection* (1661), printed by Matthew Simmons for Giles Calvert, Wing B3395; *Aurora* (1656), printed by John Streater for Giles Calvert, Wing B3397; *Concerning the election of grace* (1655), printed by John Streater for Giles Calvert, Wing B3398; *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen* (1649), printed by M. Simmons for Gyles Calvert, Wing B3404; *The First Apologie to Balthazar Tylcken* (1661), printed by M.S. for Giles Calvert, Wing B3406; *XL Questions Concerning the Soule* (1647), printed by M[atthew] S[immons], Wing B3408; *Mercurius Teutonicus* (1649), printed by M.S. for H. Blunden, Wing B3409; *Mysterium Magnum* (1654), printed by M.S. for H. Blunden, Wing B3411; *Of Christ's Testaments* (1652), printed by M. Simmons, Wing B3412; *Of the Four Complexions* (1661), printed by M.S. for Giles Calvert, Wing B3414; *The Second Apologie to Balthazar Tylcken* (1661), printed by M.S. for Giles Calvert, Wing B3416; *An Apologie or Defence for the Requisite* (1656), printed by John Streater for Giles Calvert, Wing B3396; *Theosophick Letters* (1661), printed by M.S. for Giles Calvert, Wing B3426; *Considerations upon Esaiah Stiefel* (1661), printed by M.S. for Giles Calvert, Wing B3401; *The Second Booke Concerning the Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (1648), printed by M.S. for H. Blunden, Wing B3417; *The Third Booke of the Author* (1650), printed by M.S. for H. Blunden, Wing B3422; *Signatura Rerum* (1651), printed by John Macock for Gyles Calvert, Wing B3419; *Two Theosophical Epistles* (1645), printed by M.S. for B. Allen, Wing B3425; *The Way to Christ Discovered* (1648), printed by M.S. for H. Blunden, Wing B3426.
- 63 Mary Cary, *A Word in Season* (1647), printed by R.W. for Giles Calvert, Wing C739, TT E393(26); *The Resurrection of the witnesses* (1648), printed by D.M. for Giles Calvert, Wing C737, TT E550(21) and TT E719(2); Henry Jessey's transcription of Sarah Wight's visionary experience in *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced* (1647), printed by Matthew Simmons, Wing J687; Elizabeth Avery, *Scripture Prophecies Opened* (1647), printed for Giles Calvert, Wing A4272; and John Rogers, *Sagrir or doomesday dawning nigh* (1654), printed by R.I. to be sold by Giles Calvert, Wing R1814.

- 64 See Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp.51, 191, 205. Smith also cites a letter from Llwyd to Jessey written July 1656, National Library of Wales MS11438D, letter 86, 11.8-11, and points out that he corresponded with William Erberry and John Saltmarsh. For an account of this see *The Testimony of William Erberry* (1658) Wing E3239, pp.95, 104, 111-2, 234.
- 65 Mary Cary, *The Little Horns Doom and Downfall and A New and More Exact Mappe or Description of New Jerusalem's Glory* (1651) Wing C736, p.106. Hereafter cited in the text respectively as *Little Horns Doom* and *New Jerusalem's Glory*.
- 66 Other contemporary editions of Hildegard's visions include those printed in Cologne, 1628, and in 1658 an account of her life and prophecies were incorporated into *A further Discovery of the Mystery of Jesuitisme* (1658) TT1842(1).
- 67 See John Rogers, *Jegar-Sahadvtha: An Oyled Pillar* (1657) Wing J1809, TT E919(9), pp.28-9.
- 68 Anna Trapnel, *A Legacy for Saints* (1654) Wing T2032, TT806(1), p.4. Hereafter cited in the text as *Legacy*.
- 69 See Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.157.
- 70 Ibid., pp.157, 158.
- 71 Ibid., p.163.
- 72 Ibid., p.161, my italics.

CHAPTER FOUR

PATTERNS OF MYSTICAL DISCOURSE

In order to examine the implications of a continuity of mystical discourse from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, this chapter focuses on a comparative analysis of medieval and seventeenth-century mysticism, and explores the extent to which the patterns of medieval mysticism reoccur in the seventeenth-century mystical discourse of the Fifth Monarchists. Luce Irigaray's inversion of Plato's 'simile of the cave' in her essay 'La Mystérique', together with her knowledge of the mystical experiences of Angela of Foligno and Marguerite Porete, enable us to understand the mystical journey for women as a metaphor for "woman's" journey towards self-knowledge. From her knowledge of these thirteenth-century mystics Irigaray recognised that mysticism offered women a means through which they could discover their essential self. This discovery was allied with the realisation that female flesh was the embodiment of a divine spirit. This chapter aims to extend the analysis of women's self-deification through mysticism by looking at examples of mystical writing from the High Middle Ages to the seventeenth century.

The period from the twelfth to the early part of the fifteenth century, the High to Late Middle Ages, was the period most commonly associated with mysticism as a means of knowing 'God'. Actual accounts of mystical experience, taken from a selection of writings by mystics who have been listed among the most renowned of this period, will be employed as a means of ascertaining gender specific patterns of mystical discourse in their writings. The mystical writings of women such as Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), St. Bridget (1303-1373), Margery Kempe (1373-1439), and Julian of Norwich (c.1342-1416), will therefore be considered alongside those of the male mystics Bernard of Clairvaux (c.1091-1153), Richard Rolle (c.1300-1349), the

anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (published c.1300-1349), and Walter Hilton (d.1395). I aim to demonstrate that medieval women's experience of mysticism, which is described in terms of illness, fasting, silence, tears, laughter and visions, functions to dramatise the discursive relationship between the mystic and the divine spirit, enabling women mystics to re-figure their bodies and define the feminine in their own terms.

Mysticism reappeared in the mid-seventeenth century with the publication of mystical writings by the Fifth Monarchy women. Indeed it has been suggested that mysticism in the form of revelatory experience never disappeared.¹ However, the implication that there was a continuity of women's visionary experience from the twelfth century to the seventeenth century is problematic. Scholars of women's writing warn against adopting such an ahistorical, universalising approach to female experience. In her study of female prophecy in Late Medieval and Early Modern England, Diane Watt suggests that the "way forward seems to be to avoid those universalising tendencies that falsify our understanding of the past".² Since, as Patricia Crawford explains, "women are not a monolithic group", being "born into different social levels", differences of class, age, and the age in which they wrote ought to be taken into consideration.³ Critics are rightly cautious about collapsing the distinctions between medieval and early modern, yet there are problems with these divisive labels, as indeed Watt notes. According to Watt, one of the principal arguments against the idea of the great divide in the sense of a transition in religious, political and social terms is that the Renaissance was not the homogenous intellectual movement it is often seen to have been [...] The Renaissance invented the 'Middle Ages' in order to break with the past and emphasize its own achievements; the term is a historical construct like any other.⁴

Similarly, Judith Bennett claims that the "breach in historical continuity" between the medieval world and the world of early-modern Europe "has been deepened far beyond

its natural contours by scholarly depictions of the great divide".⁵ At the same time as challenging the concept of 'the great divide', a study of this kind must also take into account, what Bennett describes as the "varied and changing patriarchal contexts of women's lives".⁶

If women writing in the High to Late Middle Ages were constrained by their twofold "position of subjection in society and of object in discourse", did the Fifth Monarchy women write under different conditions to their medieval forbears, or was their position in a male dominated society the same?⁷ What were their social positions and educational backgrounds? There is only a limited amount of evidence to inform us of the social and educational backgrounds of women visionaries in both the medieval and early modern periods. In fact nothing is known about the social background of Julian of Norwich before she became the respected anchoress, though her *Revelations* show her to be shrewd and learned. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, however, tells us that she was a gentlewoman, married to "a worschepful burgeys".⁸ More is known of the early life of Hildegard of Bingen since she was placed in a monastery at the age of seven and tutored by a noblewoman named Jutta, who later became abbess. Some biographical information on the Fifth Monarchy women is contained within Fifth Monarchist texts. In *The Cry of a Stone*, Anna Trapnel introduces herself as "the daughter of a *William Trapnel*, Shipwright, and tells her reader that she was "trained up to my book and writing", and in *Report and Plea* she affirms that she was able to keep "house with the means my Mother left me", and refers to portable wealth in the form of "Plate and Rings".⁹ In a letter prefacing Mary Cary's double publication, *The Little Horns Doom and Downfall and A New and More Exact Mappe of New Jerusalem's Glory* (1651), Christopher Feake testifies that the text treats of "some of the things (being a Gentlewoman's thoughts put into form and order by her self)"¹⁰, thereby indicating that to some extent her social position justifies her

writing. In John Rogers' *Ohel or Beth-shemesh* (1653) there is a note to explain that Elizabeth Avery's father was a "Mr. Parker [...] that able Divine that writ *De Eccles. Polit.* So largely, but that married Master Avery a Commissary in *Ireland*".¹¹ Sarah Wight is "The Daughter of a gracious *Matrone*" of Henry Jessey's acquaintance in London, her father was "Mr *Thomas Wight*, sometimes of the *Auditors Office*, and of the *Exchequers Office*", her step-brother Jonathon Vaughan attended "*All soules in Oxford*".¹²

Whereas the social and educational backgrounds of mystics like Margery Kempe and Sarah Wight share similarities and suggest that they were privileged, the basic foundations for their religious beliefs were different in accordance with changes brought about during and after the Reformation, and as Watt notes, the implications of crucial matters of difference should not be underestimated.¹³ Though Watt is cautious about over-emphasising the similarities of experience, she nevertheless notes similitude, pointing out in her comparative study of such female prophets as Margery Kempe, Anne Askew, and Lady Eleanor Davies, that "given these differences, the contrasts between their experiences and discourses are not as great as might have been expected."¹⁴ And she goes on to argue that their experience of persecution was the same. Moreover, she emphasises the shared importance of prophecy and mysticism to these women in providing them with a means to articulate their experience of persecution, for "those persecuted or oppressed, whatever their sex, rank or education, could voice their dissatisfaction through this type of discourse."¹⁵

Emphasising that through visionary experience "women were able to intervene in the religious and political discourses of their times", one of the main arguments in Watt's study of female prophecy is to demonstrate, as she says,

that by the later Middle Ages, there existed in Western Christendom established traditions of popular and specifically female prophecy which, although open to appropriation by the various and often conflicting power structures, have their

own partial autonomy and which are, to some extent at least, independent cultural, and thus potentially political forces.¹⁶

In proving this she deals tentatively with the impact of a specifically female prophecy on later women writers. It is my contention that it is possible to identify a level of continuity in women's visionary writing from Hildegard to the Fifth Monarchy women which recognises social and historical difference. The second half of the chapter will therefore consider the extent to which the gender specific patterns of medieval mystical discourse, which involve the political potential referred to by Watt, are repeated in the writing of the Fifth Monarchist mystics, Anna Trapnel, Sarah Wight, Mary Cary, Elizabeth Avery and John Rogers. In this way the mystical experiences described by their predecessors will be used to clarify the significance of mystical discourse for the Fifth Monarchy women. However, it is first of all necessary to begin with a definition of mysticism in the High Middle Ages, since it was understood in very specific terms, as well as a consideration of the extent to which prevalent notions of the body contributed to the belief that one's physicality was an impediment to mystical union.

The Three Stages of Mysticism

In the High Middle Ages mysticism was dominated by the teachings of the late fifth or early sixth-century Syrian monk known as Pseudo-Dionysius, and evidence of his influence is most apparent in the theological writings of Richard Rolle, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and Walter Hilton. For these male authors mysticism was founded on ideas, epitomised by the titles of such works as the *Scale of Perfection* or *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which suggest that the only way to 'know' God was through a process of contemplation and meditation. Louis Martz has described this meditation as both a science and an art form, a "supernaturally derived discipline [which sets] the substance of natural life apart, to give it a form, a meaning,

and a value which cannot be evaded".¹⁷ Emphasising the principles of "logic and rhetoric" Martz describes a systematic and scholarly engagement with the divine spirit.¹⁸

The method of systematic study which would enable one to achieve mystical union was threefold. In his work, *Mystica Theologia*, Pseudo-Dionysius had outlined the path to direct communion with God which these later writers engaged with, encouraging all aspiring mystics to follow the mystic way of purgation, illumination and union. The purgative stage of mysticism dealt specifically with the purification of the body, a vital necessity for those seeking communion with divinity. The purgation of one's body was also associated with a dark period in which the aspiring mystic was threatened with despair. Despair was the state in which one existed without hope of salvation and occurred as knowledge of God brought to the aspiring mystic a sharper sense of sin and thus greater grief. Spiritual illumination was understood to be attainable through a profound level of contemplation which would eventually result in a revelation of light, and knowledge of God's love and power. The aspiring mystic was urged by Hilton, Rolle and the *Cloud* author to contemplate God as an absence, either as being "nowhere", or placed "up", far removed from the earth.¹⁹ Union with God was understood to be achieved by special privilege. And although "God" was acknowledged to be fundamentally indescribable, since "He" was beyond the mystic's power of comprehension, this did not render "God" unknowable. Mysticism is the experiential perception of 'God's' presence and reports of union with 'God' suggest that the experience has been understood in terms of numinousness.²⁰

Given the transcendental associations of mysticism with the attempt to go beyond the bounds of usual human knowledge and experience, one might have expected gender difference to be eradicated, yet this is not the case. Indeed, as we shall see, gendered notions of the 'corrupt' body virtually preclude women from

attempting to follow the 'mystic way' prescribed by these male authors. However, women themselves countermand this by suggesting that the body in all its corruption is the only way of 'knowing God'. Union for women mystics implies, as Irigaray has argued, the deification of the female body and this directly challenges the loathing of the female flesh described, as Laurie A. Finke points out, in "countless official church documents".²¹

Medieval Mysticism and the Body

For mystics the body was seen as nourishment for either divine or diabolical forces, and, as they wrote instructions for purging the site of corruption mystics produced an image of an inherently wretched body that impeded their path to salvation. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, wrote of his fear that his "corruptible body" will "nouryshe myne enmye agenste me".²² Similarly, the *Cloud* author worried that because the

soul wont in this deadly body, evermore is the sharpness of oure understanding in beholding of al gustily things, bot most specially of God, medelid with sum maner of fantasie; for the whiche oure werk schuld be unclene, & bot if more wonder were, it schuld lede us into moche errour.²³

Therefore, he continues, "tyme, stede, & body, thees thre schuld be forgeten in alle goostly worching" (*Cloud*, p.133). According to the *Cloud* author, the only way for the mystic to attain contemplative perfection was to prohibit physical urges. Since physical urges render "man" like "alle other beestes", the mystic must effect the complete "subieccion of the body to the spirit" (*Cloud*, p.113). Both the *Cloud* author and Bernard of Clairvaux are following the mystical directions of Pseudo-Dionysius, who, in stating, "among all thing that almighty god hath created & fourmed[,] man is made of the most foule & abominable mater"²⁴, maintained the belief that created nature was sin itself. The Countess of Richmond's early sixteenth-century translation of Pseudo-

Dionysius's *Mirrore of Golde* (1522) carried these views through to the sixteenth-century, and maintained the inherent corruption of humankind on the basis that humanity is first "conceyved in the unclene spott of synne [and] nourished within thy moders womb [with] corrupt & infected blod" (*Mirrore of Golde*).

As Frances Yates points out, medical and scientific theories contributed to these beliefs. In the medieval period the theory of the elements was a popular scientific principle. This theory assumed that everything in the natural world was composed of four elements - earth, water, air, fire. To these corresponded the elemental qualities - cold, moist, dry, hot - which could be classified and graded.²⁵ Medieval physiological theories which assumed that the female provided the matter of the foetus, the male the life or spirit, corresponded to the elemental theories.²⁶ Implicit in this, as well as in the Countess of Richmond's translation of the *Mirrore of Golde*, is the suggestion that corruption originates with the female since it is through her body that the form of "man" is created and nourished in all the perceived foulness of the womb. The gender symbolism of matter and spirit posited women as earth and water (cold and moist), men as air and fire (dry and hot). Thus according to the medieval scientific and medical theories outlined by Yates, the sponginess and porosity of the female physiology not only made a woman more emotionally volatile and energetic; it also meant that she might experience difficulty in separating her powers of rational observation from her emotional or biological impulses. Since the female body has more orifices than the male body, and since women were seen to lack any reliable central core or conscience, the female mind would be easily permeated both by outside influences and by their own strong inner drives. Thus, women who aspired to mystical union were understood to be hindered by their physicality to a much greater degree than men, since any feeling, such as anger or lust, might seep involuntarily into the soul and pollute her religious ideals.²⁷

It is for these reasons that the purgative stage was considered especially dangerous for women. Richard Rolle's *Form of Living* mentions despair as one of the devil's weapons against beginners like Margery Kempe who have to pass through the purgative stage.²⁸ Early on in her mystical experience she "drede[s]" the power of "owyr gostly enemy" who "ful besyly sergyth owr complexions & owr dysposycionys" (Kempe, p.14). Since the devil is excluded from the possibility of salvation, he seeks to keep the mystic aspiring to the eternal bliss of heaven denied to himself. As Susan Snyder points out, the devil was always acknowledged as the first cause of despair, and many mystical writers were aware that Satan must, after all, find a weak spot to attack.²⁹ Certainly Margery writes that "wher that he [the devil] fyndyth us most freel ther [...] he leyth hys snar" (Kempe, p.14). Of course, women were assumed to be 'the weaker vessel', essentially impure and more readily corrupted since the female body has more orifices than the male through which the devil can enter, and Margery's experience of succumbing to the devil is described in typically sexual terms: "And so he leyd be-forn this creatur the snar of letchery, whan sche wend that all fleschly lust had al hol ben qwenchyd in hir". Due to her constant feelings of lust Margery believes that "God had forsakyn hir" and is greatly "labowrd wyth horrybyl temptacyons of lettherye & of dyspeyr" over a two-year period (Kempe, pp.14-16). At one point in her despair she is "ovyrcomyn" with the temptation to sin and propositions a man who is not her husband. We hear that she went to a man who had spoken to her "to wetyn yf he wold than consentyn to hire". The man replies that "he ne wold for al the good in this world; he had levar ben hewyn as smal as flesch to the pott" and Margery leaves him, feeling "schamyd & confusyd in hir-self" (Kempe, p.15). This rather humorous anecdote masks the potential danger of the purgative stage since women mystics could become the literal embodiment of evil as Satan was understood to take possession of their bodies, controlling their will.

The Gender Specifics of Mystical Discourse

Emphasising transcendence and the logical ascent of the soul towards God, the mystical discourse of some of the most renowned male mystics of the High Middle Ages, Bernard of Clairvaux, Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle and the *Cloud* author is focused away from the body. As Laurie Finke notes, clearly affected by the belief in the fundamental corruption of the human body, they "attempted to represent a sort of disembodied spirituality".³⁰ Following the teachings of Pseudo-Dionysius, these writers emphasise the transcendence of God in an attempt to separate their physicality from their spirituality. As a means of achieving this aim, they conformed to a tradition in which the offensive, more material aspects of one's physicality were displaced onto the female body, thereby contributing to the collection of ideas which culminated in the image of the inherently "grotesque" nature of the female body. Again, as Finke notes, "woman" was "constructed" by the "dominant culture as the grotesque body, the other, whose discursive norms include heterogeneity, disproportion, a focus on gaps, orifices, and symbolic filth".³¹ However, women mystics of the High Middle Ages used precisely these images as a means of attaining mystical union.

In contrast to her male contemporaries, Julian of Norwich, for example, embraces the physicality of the human body, speaking quite comfortably of bodily orifices and bodily functions as an illustration of the extent of divine love. In one of her revelations she even explains the value of an essential human 'urge' in wholly practical terms:

A man goeth upright, and the Soule of his body is sparred [enclosed] as a purse full faire, and when it is time of his necessity, it is opened and sparred againe full honestlie.³²

In this case her visionary learning enables her to comprehend human defecation as

both a natural and an "honest" occurrence, thus demonstrating Julian's belief that the body is loved by God even "to the lowest part of our need" (*Revelations*, p.15). Julian apprehends what the male mystical writers do not, that God "hath no despite of that he made, ne hath he no disdaine to serve us at the simplest office that to our bodie longeth in kind" (*Revelations*, p.16).

Moreover, in contradiction to the mystical writing of Walter Hilton and the *Cloud* author, which claimed that access to God was impossible unless a strict programme of bodily penance was followed in order to purify the body for divine encounter, Hildegard, Julian, and Margery received the visions associated with mystical illumination, freely in all the physical 'corruption' of their sick beds. In her best known work, *Scivias* (written between 1141 and 1151), Hildegard of Bingen is put forward as "The person whom I [God] have chosen and whom I have miraculously stricken as I willed".³³ Julian of Norwich declares to her audience that God visits her as she lies "dead from the middes downwarde" to make her understand "that what man or woman wilfully choseth God in this Life for Love, he may be sure [...] of the bliss of Heaven" (*Revelations*, pp.7,171).

Following childbirth, Margery Kempe, "wenyng sche mygth not levyn", describes being irresistibly drawn towards God, her mystical career beginning with the appearance of Christ "clad in a mantyl of purpyl sylke" (*Kempe*, pp.6,8). Indeed, immediately after her first vision of Christ Margery explains that she felt impure and attempted to purify her flesh in the usual way by doing "gret bodyly penawnce", which took the form of fasting and wearing a hair cloth shirt every day (*Kempe*, p.12). However, Christ reappears to tell her that he knows she has a shirt of "hayr" upon her back, and informs her that she does not need to wear it (*Kempe*, p.17). In so doing Christ reaffirms that she does not need to purify her body because he has done it for her through his suffering. It is reported that he says: "I am comyn to thee, Jhesu Cryst,

that deyde on the Crosse sufferynge byttyr peynes & passyons for thee. I, the same God, forgefe thee thy synnes to the utterest poynt", thus assuring Margery that "so mych grace" will "flowe" into her that "that alle the world shal mervelyn therof".³⁴ Already the mystical journey described by medieval women mystics suggests the importance of the body, in all its physical corruption, as a means of knowing God, rather than experiencing it as an incumbent evil from which one must distance oneself.

Countermanding the teachings of Pseudo-Dionysius, and those of their male contemporaries keen to maintain a rigid structure of ideas, women mystics like Julian of Norwich put forward a concept of created nature as thoroughly good. Julian's concept of the maternal image, for example, offers a countermeasure for the "sin" of human nature, and differs dramatically from those of her male contemporaries. In Julian's scheme, sin does not corrupt the essential goodness of the self, "for in that same time that God knit him to our body in the Maidens Womb, he took our sensual Soul. In which taking he, us all having beclosed in him, he oned it to our substance" (*Revelations*, p.149). As Julian's mystical theology demonstrates when Christ reunites in himself divine substance and human sensuality, he proves human "vertue": "By which offing, we be kept as clean, and as noble as we were made" (*Revelations*, p.150). All that the person was created to be, including the body and its sensuality, is taken up into the full spiritual life made possible by the incarnation of Christ. For Julian, therefore, the purgative stage of mystical experience, outlined and adhered to by her male contemporaries, was not a necessary precursor to mystical illumination and union.

For the author of the *Cloud*, on the other hand, even "speche" is debased since it "is a bodely werk wrought with the tonge, the whiche is an instrument of the body" (*Cloud*, p.114). Since his aim is to set out guidelines for the aspiring mystic, he acknowledges that mystical experience must be explained: "it schal be spoken of", he

can only reconcile himself to the physicality of the action by striving to understand it, as he affirms, spiritually: "Schal it therfore be taken & conceyuid bodely? Nay, it bot goostly" (*Cloud*, p.114). Julian, in contrast, embraces all directions in order to describe where humanity stands in relation to God. Throughout her text, Julian uses the womb-like analogy of enclosure to emphasise the immanence of God:

For as the Bodie is cladd in the Cloath, and the Flesh in the Skinn, and the Bones in the Flesh, and the Heart in the bulke, so are we, Soul and Bodie, cladd and enclosed in the Goodnes of God' (*Revelations*, p16).

God surrounds her, enclosing her, affirming her spiritual security. Julian, is consequently full of the importance of self-knowledge, since "to know our self" in all our physicality is to know "endless continuant Love; with sureness of keeping, and blissful Salvation" (*Revelations*, p.104). Julian's words were written for "Man or Woman", but they must have had a special resonance for women, whose sinfulness and shame was so often highlighted by ecclesiastical preaching and practice and whose self-worth was so regularly undermined (*Revelations*, p.26).

Certainly Margery, who makes her maternal body as freely available to God as it had been to her husband, gleefully quotes maternal scripture to an Archbishop who has accused her of being possessed by the devil: "Blyssed be the wombe that thee bar & the tetys that gaf thee sowkyn." (*Kempe*, pp.25, 126) Since we are told in *The Book of Margery Kempe* that Margery visited Julian of Norwich and enjoyed the "holy dalyawns that the ankres & this creatur haddyn be comownyng in the lofe of owyr Lord Jhesu Crist [for the] many days that thei were to-gedyr", it is likely that her comparable emphasis on the body derives from Julian's influence (*Kempe*, p.43). She is certainly empowered both by her relationship with God, and by the advice of "Dame Jelyan", to withstand all the "schame, & repref" that she suffered (*Kempe*, pp.42,43).

St. Bridget's *Liber Celestis* also emphasises the body as a means of reinforcing one's spiritual convictions. Indeed her visionary experience enables her to proclaim Christ's own insistence on the importance of physicality through 'His' repeated references to the fact that: "[I] entrid myn modyr wombe, of the wheche I am made".³⁵ Hildegard of Bingen had already pointed to the mother's womb as a place which offered one a primary link to God when she wrote of her "first formation, when in [her] mother's womb God raised [her] up with the breath of life, [and] he fixed this vision in [her] soul".³⁶ It is therefore apparent that women mystics do not seek to transcend their physicality. Rather they recognise the need to use their bodies as a means of reinforcing their religious devotion. Without the sensual perception which is fundamental to our physical state, St. Bridget's description of mystical union would be meaningless since the full import of the moment is felt as "a swete savour and odoure".³⁷ In so doing, they construct a relationship between "God" and their flesh, thereby developing the idea of the divinity of the human body which would enable both male and female mystics to attain union with the divine spirit.

What are the implications of this for the woman mystic's journey of self-exploration? For Julian of Norwich, self-knowledge most obviously means an increasing sense of self-worth, and this is interwoven with the rationale that one's physicality is not only acceptable, but is acceptable in its sinfulness so that humanity is not bound down with fear and guilt. Indeed, it was understood that the woman mystic had further to go in her journey towards the divine spirit since she alone was burdened with the guilt of the Fall. Therefore, when St. Bridget and Margery write with the understanding that Christ has redeemed them with his blood, it suggests, as Irigaray puts it, that the image of Christ has opened up a path of redemption because his feminised body illustrates that their bodies are not only "not [...] shameful", they are "holy".³⁸ Indeed, as Irigaray notes, Christ is that "most female of men" whose gashes,

and wounds, and flowing blood demonstrate for women mystics that wounds, sores and blood are sanctified, even sublime ('La Mystérique', pp.199-200). Identification with the figure of Christ, particularly at the moment of his Passion, enables Julian, Margery, St. Bridget and Hildegard to comprehend the value of female flesh, as it is redeemed and purified through Christ's suffering. The female body becomes holy even in its physical corruption, just as "He" was.

Since their knowledge of Christ comes through a series of visions, knowledge of their own nature was therefore dependent upon visionary experience. Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* engages with the idea that achieving self-knowledge through visionary experience was associated with self-deification, and her visionary learning provided her with the foundation for her celebrated theological views. These views, which have been understood in terms of the "feminine divine" insist on the power and significance of the feminine for women active within the religious system.³⁹ *Scivias* describes God's appearance to her in a series of visions, and is notable for its attention to the "grotesque" aspects of female physicality such as menstruation and feminine sexuality.⁴⁰ Throughout *Scivias* Hildegard insists that God is speaking through her, and she positions herself as the embodiment of a divine spirituality, manifestly proving the idea that blood and other signs of physical corruption are sanctified. For Hildegard, Julian, Margery and St. Bridget, the relationship with 'God' is dependent upon the interaction of the divine spirit with the "grotesque" body. Indeed focusing on the body as the site of mystical union, medieval women mystics describe a discursive relationship with the divine spirit which is understood through such gendered motifs as unreason, fluidity, silence and tears.

The Relationship with 'God'

The discursive relationship between the women mystic and the divine spirit is founded upon 'discourses of the body' which are gender specific. Taking the form of silence, tears, laughter and fluidity these discourses encompass mystical union. For example, in one of Margery Kempe's visions, God tells her that bodily penance and fasting would "not plesyn me so wel as thou dost whan thou art in silens & sufferyst me to speke in thy sowle" (*Kempe*, p.89). Although this correlates to the attempted silencing of women in the public sphere, for mystics silence is a necessary part of the desired ecstatic state. In Margery's case, God's injunction to silence does not preclude dialogue, the means of communication simply shifts from external to internal. Other forms of communication peculiar to women mystics include laughing and weeping. Mary Giles noted that the weeping of fifteenth-century Spanish mystic Sor Maria was an 'ecstatized discourse'.⁴¹ Similarly, Margery Kempe's weeping becomes a means of self expression, "a synguler & a specyal gyft" from God (*Kempe*, p.99). When Julian explains to Margery that "God visyteth a creatur wyth terys of contrisyon", we can understand Margery's subsequent crying as comprising an 'ecstatized discourse' (*Kempe*, p.42). For example, on beholding a church crucifix,

the Passyon of owr Lord entryd hir mende, [whereupon] sche gan to meltyn & al-to-relentyn [with] terys of pyte & compassyown. Than the fyer of lofe kyndelyd so [quickly] in hir hert that sche myth not kepyn it [secret] (*Kempe*, p.111).

It appears that Margery is experiencing and participating in a level of discourse that others are excluded from. This is clarified when, on leaving the church,

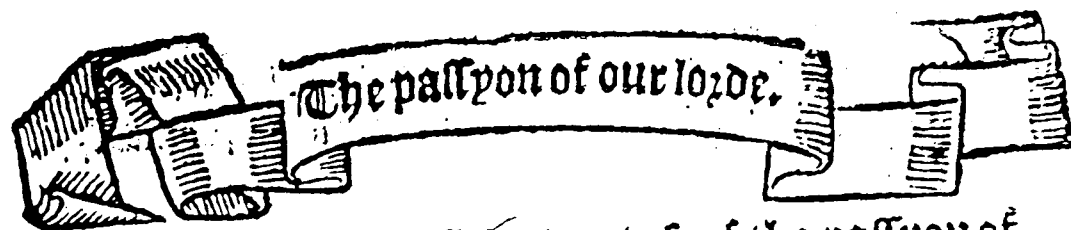
a man toke hir be the sleve & seyde, "Damsel, why wepest thou so sor?"
"Ser," sche said, "it is not thou to telle." (*Kempe*, p.111)

In contrast to Margery's tears of compassion, Julian highlights the power of laughter:

I laught mightily, and that made them to laugh that were about me, and their laughing was a liking to me [...] For I understood that we may laugh in comforting our self, and joying in *God* (*Revelations*, pp.35-6).

Like tears, laughter is an emotional response that refuses containment. Both these expressions offer a challenge to preconceived ideas surrounding the nature of spiritual experience. The essentially discursive relationship between women mystics and “God” was dramatised as their visions incorporated a projection of the self interacting with the divine.

Mary Giles has pointed to the particularly dramatic nature of women’s mysticism in the Middle Ages, to which she has given the term, 'ecstatic theatre'. This phenomenon invariably associates the woman mystic with the grief of the women at the foot of the cross (Figure 2) as they weep for Christ's suffering.⁴²



There ensueth a goostely treatyse of the passyon of
our lorde Jesu Chryst/ With many deuout contēpla
cyons/ examplēs/ and extencions of the same.

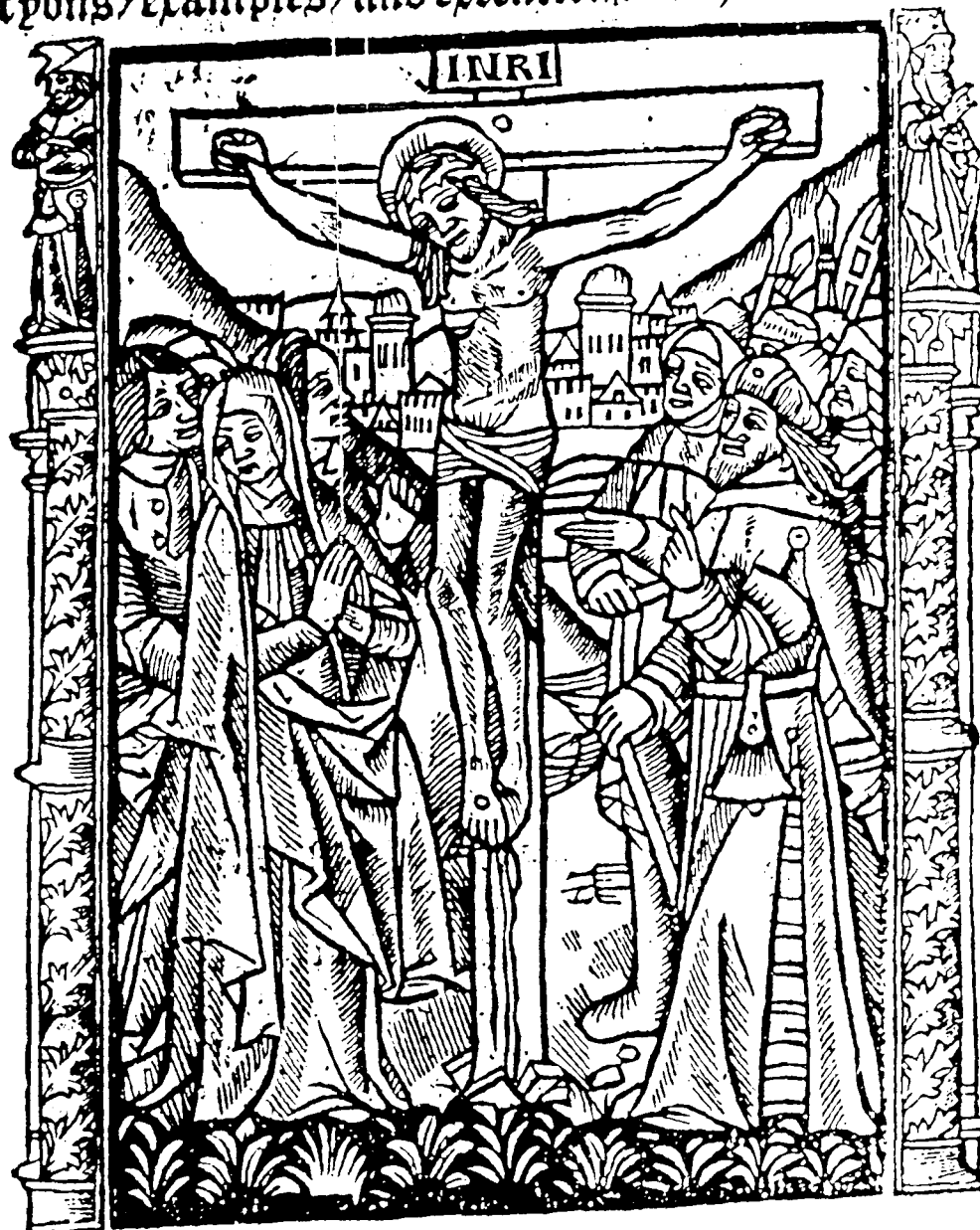


Figure 2. Title page from *The Passyon of our lorde Jesu Christe wythe the contemplatiōs* [1508?] STC 14557.

Throughout St. Bridget's *Liber Celestis* there are recurring images of the shared experience of grief at Christ's Passion between herself and the Virgin Mary. She recounts that "Mari spake: 'Doghtir, take hede to the passion of mi son' ", thereby inviting Bridget to participate in the drama of the Passion (*Liber*, p.63). St. Bridget's text contains many descriptions of Christ's wounds and the quantity of blood which pours from them as she contemplates his torn body as it hangs on the Cross, and she writes that when his mother saw this "she tremelid for sorowe, and wald have fallen downe to the erthe, had not the other wimmen halden hir upe" (*Liber*, p.481). Margery Kempe, in her visions, assures Mary: "Lady, I wil sorwe for yow, for yowr sorwe is my sorwe", and significantly, a woodcut of Christ's Passion which shows a woman sorrowing at the foot of the cross is incorporated into Winken de Worde's 1501 edition of Margery's *Boke* (Figure 3).



Figure 3. A woodcut showing the crucifixion, from Winken de Worde's edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe: Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taken out of the boke of Margerie Kempe of lyn* (1501) STC 14924.

Margery continues to describe the "reverens" with which the women present, "owr Ladiis sisterys", wash the dead body with their tears (*Kempe*, pp.193-94). Margery's vision of grief at Christ's Passion incorporates her into the divine family. Christ tells Margery, for example, that because she believes "owr Lady & sche wer al-vey to-gedyr to se owr Lordys peynys", it proves his earlier claim: "that thou art a very dowtyr to me, & a modyr also, a syster, wyfe, and a spowse" (*Kempe*, pp.190,31). Thus visions of the Virgin create a profound bond between the woman mystic and her Lady which strengthens the bond between Christ and the mystic. Indeed, to some extent Margery identified with the Virgin Mary, since she figured herself as a virgin mother of fourteen children, a mother who remained, as God assured her, "a mayden in [her] sowle" (*Kempe*, p.52). Julian's vision of Christ's Passion is also intrinsically dramatic, as she sets herself within the play to witness and participate in the events she dramatises. Julian describes "an inward Ghostly shewing" in which she sees "the great drops of Blood [that] fell down from under the Garland like Pellots [...] And in coming out they were brown red". Like Margery, she participates in the sorrow at the foot of the cross: "my Spirits were in great Travail in the beholding, mourning, dreadful, and longing" (*Revelations*, pp.118, 18, 26).

Following her dramatic participation in the Passion, Margery receives "soft teerys", and accepts Christ into her soul as the "fyre of love encresyed in hir", Christ proceeding "lyke an husbond that schulde weddyn a wyfe" (*Kempe*, pp.199, 209, 254). As Margery's notorious images of weeping suggest, fluidity is an integral part of the experience of mystical union described by medieval women mystics. At this level the relationship between the woman mystic and the divine spirit must be understood in terms of silence, tears, laughter and fluidity since it exists beyond language. As Irigaray argues, no words can express this highly emotive, highly fluid relationship, in which the divine spirit is, "In her and /or outside her" as "she loses all sense of corporeal

boundary" ('La Mystérique', p.201). Images of fluidity in women's mystical writing are particularly significant, since, by its very nature, fluidity suggests that which cannot be fixed, that which eludes any definite identification. Thus Margery can encompass all means of secular feminine identification - daughter, wife and mother; and all means of religious feminine identification - chaste virgin, pilgrim and nun in an order unto herself, wearing "clothys of whyte & non other colowr" (*Kempe*, p.32), dressing according to God's will. The fluidity of Margery's identity ensures that she cannot be fixed, defined or controlled, but can only be known to her self.

Of course male mystics also described mystical union, but for them it remained an experience communicable through the ordinary medium of language. They did not experience it in terms of laughter, tears or fluidity of being. Indeed, Elizabeth Robertson has noted that the mystical works written by men, particularly Richard Rolle's *Incendium amoris* and the *Cloud of Unknowing*, are virtually devoid of such images.⁴³ However, they did refer to the principal figure of Christ in his suffering and Passion, which seems most potently to facilitate mystical union.

Erotic imagery for mystical union is drawn from the biblical tradition of prophecy and revelation, and especially from the *Song of Songs*, which ever since Bernard of Clairvaux's famous allegorical interpretation has stood for the mystical union of God and the soul. To attain a greater "understondynge of hymself", Bernard of Clairvaux presents himself firstly as lover of Christ: "by wyll of love I love and desyre him", then as spiritual partner in marriage, as he vows his female soul, "she may not rest and abyde but [...] love honoure and worshyppe hym". Yet Bernard of Clairvaux's description of the mystical experience is a simple declaration of himself as "spoused and wedded to hym [Christ]" (Bernard, *Meditations*). It lacks the sexual urgency of the experiences of the medieval women mystics. Margery Kempe rejoices at her experience of spiritual bridehood, which begins with Christ's words to her: "I nedys be

homly wyth thee, & lyn in thy bed wyth thee [...] whan thou art in bed, take me to thee as for thy weddyd husbond" (*Kempe*, p.90). And in Christ's first revelation to St. Bridget, he assures her: "mi hert sall be with thy hert and it sall be enflammed with mi lue, as thou sees a dri tre enflammed with fire" (*Liber*, p.7). The emergence of a particularly female spirituality in the high Middle Ages, often with a strong emphasis on the erotic, is manifest in the explicitly sexual nature of women's mysticism. Like Bridget, Margery also speaks of "a flawme of fyer a-bowt hir brest ful hoot & delectabyll" (*Kempe*, p.219). Thus the lust she experienced during her state of despair which she associated with the devil is now channelled towards the divine spirit. In the final analysis the sexual desire she depicts is spiritual. For Margery, as indeed with St. Bridget, "the fyr of love encresyd in hir, and hir undirstandynge was mor illumynynd & hir devocyon mor fervent than it was be-for" (*Kempe*, p.209). So far from the erotic being an allegory for the spiritual, as in Bernard of Clairvaux, it is precisely through erotic union that the lessons of God are learned.

And it is in this way that Julian of Norwich is acknowledged to make her most original contributions to mystical discourse. In her tenth revelation Julian sees that "With a good chear *our good Lord* looked into his side", he then leads Julian "by the same Wound into his side within [...] And there he shewed a fair and delectable place". Christ then speaks to her, "*My Darling, behold and see thy Lord [...] And for my love enjoy with me*" (*Revelations*, p.58). Male mystical writing uses the language of passion, but prohibits actual physical passion in an effort to channel all desire away from the body towards God. Julian's vision reinterprets the image of the male bleeding Christ in such a way that the hierarchy of male dominance is subverted; and the feminine, the all-nurturing blood, is discovered to be the potent origin of Christ's Passion. Christ therefore becomes the visionary's mother in his nurturing, life-sustaining aspect and her lover in his delight at her spiritual beauty and in his

eagerness to bestow his potency on her. Julian is quite clear that "in our *Mother* of mercy *Jesu Christ*, we have our reforming, and our restoring, in whom our parts be oned" (*Revelations*, p.152). Now we can understand mystical union as both erotic encounter and as a fusion of disunited 'parts', in which Christ as mother "maketh in us such a unity that, when it is truly seen, no man can part them self from other" (*Revelations*, pp.171-2).

The image of God as "our very first *Mother* in *Grace* by taking of our kind made" (*Revelations*, p.155), unites human and divine perspectives to create a divinity which is all encompassing. From entering "the blessed Wounds of our *Saviour*" (*Revelations*, p.163), to her re-appraisal of necessary bodily functions, Julian's writing transforms the predominant horror and dread of women, associated with the fall from grace, into an assurance of salvation. This is exemplified in the parable of the Lord and his servant, her version of the Fall which excludes, and thereby exonerates, Eve. Julian transfers human culpability from Eve onto the "servant that was shewed for *Adam*", and by "*Adam*", Julian states, "I understand all man". According to Julian "the manhood of *Adam* [is] all the mischief and feebleness". Thus "*Adam* fell from Life to Death into the shade of this wretched World; and after that into Hell". From this point salvation is only possible through the regenerative power of woman: "*Gods Son* fell with *Adam* into the shade of the Maidens Womb; which was the fairest Daughter of *Adam*; and that was for to excuse *Adam* from blame". Thus the maternal image, scorned and abhorred as the incarnation of sin by male mystical writers is the means by which *Adam*, and therefore all humanity, is "fetched [...] out of Hell" (*Revelations*, pp.118-126). Julian's version of the Fall in which *Adam* is culpable is authorised by God, as Julian learns the truth through interpreting divine visions. Julian's unification of humanity emerges from her awareness of the conflict between the unconditional love and goodness of God that she sees in her visions, and the simultaneous awareness that

she has of the Church's teaching concerning the fearful wrath of God towards sinful creatures.⁴⁴

Throughout the writings of St. Bridget, Margery and Julian, the image of motherhood is used to convince people of God's accessibility, and it functions to invert the male mystical doctrines of divinity, and by extension the defining ideologies of gender upon which their world was founded. For St. Bridget, the Virgin Mary is the most potent image of motherhood, and it is an image which literally communicates the "charite of Goddes lufe" (*Liber*, p.63). Thus for their contemporaries, Julian's experience was just one example which proved the accessibility of "God our Mother" (*Revelations*, p.153).

Medieval Mysticism and the Fifth Monarchists

To what extent are we able to identify these gendered patterns of mystical discourse in the writing of the Fifth Monarchy women? Though some might point out that it hardly seems feasible to consider similarities in women's mystical writing, particularly given that the motivations of the Fifth Monarchy women were chiefly political, an assessment of gender specificity in the writing of Hildegard of Bingen, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich and St. Bridget, and the extent to which this was a challenge to traditional views, reveals a high level of involvement in the public political sphere. Certainly the spiritual and political power of medieval women mystics is acknowledged by such critics as Diane Watt who points out that "Kempe is compared to women like Hildegard of Bingen, Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, who all wielded particular spiritual and political power."⁴⁵ One example of a continuity in this aspect of female empowerment, which Diane Watt points to, is implied in the hanging of the 'Holy Maid of Kent', Elizabeth Barton, for treason in 1534. Though her participation in the political sphere was short-lived, Elizabeth Barton proved that female visionary

experience remained a formidable challenge to authority.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the Fifth Monarchy women, Sarah Wight, Elizabeth Avery, Mary Cary and Anna Trapnel, were separated from the medieval women mystics by several centuries, and the gap between the Middle Ages and the early modern period has been described as a chasm.⁴⁷ One might also justifiably assume that any comparative analysis of religious writing would emphasise the idea of 'the great divide' between medieval and early modern. Yet we already begin to see that this is not necessarily so. As both Watt and Bennett point out, the "paradigm of a great divide, quite simply, does not hold" because, if for no other reason, the

need to validate their own experiences, to vindicate themselves against accusations that they were abnormal because they rejected the sexual and social roles into which they were born, is a theme of many of their writings.⁴⁸

Despite such differences as the Reformation, the basic power structure of society remained the same: men were dominant and women were subordinate to them. Thus women's exclusion from discourse is a key component in the argument for similitude. By definition the Fifth Monarchy women writers sought to access the male dominated sphere since they evinced the desire to express themselves in print. Looking at the writings of Anna Trapnel, Sarah Wight, Elizabeth Avery, and Mary Cary the aim of this comparative analysis is to uncover the extent to which the Fifth Monarchy women followed their medieval predecessors in turning to mysticism as a means of self-discovery and self-expression. To determine both the degree to which the gendered images which characterise the writing of Hildegard of Bingen, St. Bridget, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe recur in the writing of the Fifth Monarchy women, and the implications of any recurrence, it is necessary to consider the writings of Trapnel, Avery, Cary and Wight alongside the male mystic John Rogers.

There is an account of Avery's conversion in John Rogers' 1653 text, *Ohel*,

which, we are told, "*was taken from Elizabeth Avery, out of her own mouth, and declared by her self to the whole Church*" (Ohe!, p.402). In this "testimony" she tells her audience that when she was "about sixteen years of age" she "began to be very strict, and so retired in [her] life, that many wondered at it" (Ohe!, p.403). During this period of 'retirement' she seems to experience a mysterious sense of divine communion for she says: "I could not tell how I was once wrapt up in a *light*, and *hearing* something spoken of *Free-grace*, then I melted." (Ohe!, p.403) Avery obviously finds it difficult to understand and explain her experience but her use of the word 'melted' suggests the intensity of mystical union in which the subject seems to transcend her solid, physical state, becoming fluid as she interacts with 'God'. As part of her "testimony" Avery goes on to give an account of the severe grief she suffered following the deaths of four of her children, and she recalls that "God *wonderfully appeared*; and then was it that *Christ was manifested* to my spirit, and I was in a *trance* for a while, but after I awakened *full of joy*" (Ohe!, p.404). At a time in her life when she most needed it, and "looked for it" (Ohe!, p.404), she felt assured of spiritual comfort, and since this comfort takes the form of visionary experience it has further significance, as she states:

I was *much refreshed* by the Lord two or three years, and was much *contented*, and had his *teachings within me*, yea, and (many times) *without his outward instruments*; for I had his *Spirit*, his *voice speaking within me*, and God alone was with me, and no *strange god* (Ohe!, p.404).

For a period lasting "two or three years" Avery describes a situation wherein her mystical learning enables her to follow a path of independent religious devotion, "without [the] outward instruments" of the church. The inner strength she gains from the relationship she describes between herself and the divine spirit sustains her during her time of grief, and for most of the civil war years.

In 1647 Elizabeth Avery had presented *Scripture-Prophecies Opened*, "to the view of the whole world".⁴⁹ This was a political treatise which anticipated the beginning of the new "kingdom of the Saints" (*Scripture-Prophecies*, p.16). Crucially, Avery's politics were affirmed through her new-found self-awareness which had been achieved through a mystical relationship with God. She claimed in her prefatory letter "that I do enjoy all in God: And though I may be counted mad to the world, I shall speak words of sobernesse" (*Scripture-Prophecies*, p.ii). Throughout her text she clearly suggests that her knowledge was facilitated by the "greatest joy" of mystical "communion", and repeatedly suggests her embodiment of the divine spirit. For Avery, the "humanity of Christ" proves the manifestation of 'His' spirit in her, as she writes, for example, "*I possesse all things in my God, in whom I live, and he in me*" (*Scripture-Prophecies*, p.17). It also proves for her that "God is manifested in the flesh of the Saints" since "they are the temples of the living God, the sons and daughters of God Almighty, who do partake of the same nature, union, love and glory as Christ our Saviour" (*Scripture-Prophecies*, pp.2, 11). Avery has experienced self-illumination through an inner journey, "discovering those things which are hidden" inside herself (*Scripture-Prophecies*, p.12). The result of this self-knowing is similar to that of Julian of Norwich, for her vision of "Christ our Saviour" enables her to preach redemption for both men and women.

Scripture-Prophecies, the only text of Avery's published under her name, is relatively short, and in comparison with the other Fifth Monarchist mystics, her mystical experience is straightforward in that it does not evince the more acute levels of introspection which are so notable in the writings of Anna Trapnel, Sarah Wight and John Rogers. In John Rogers' text *Ohel*, for example, he incorporated a series of religious 'experiences', one of which was his own, and during the retelling of "*the Truth or further Experience of John Rogers*", he writes of the intensity of his mystical

experiences of despair and illumination (*Ohel*, p.419).

Rogers begins by recounting how his mystical experience was initiated by a fearful vision in which he was "*suddenly set a running* as if [he] had been *possessed*". And "not having any *strength*", as he states, "to *stay* my self (were it upon my life)", he "was (headlong) *carried* though a *little gate-way*, where [...] there was set a *naked sword*, glistening with a *fearfull edge*". Rogers describes a state of absolute powerlessness as he is confronted "with a *broad blade* most *keen* and *cruell*", at which "*sad sight*" he "*gastly screeched*" and tells how he

had not the *least power* to stay, or stop my *precipitant* course; but I was quickly carried quite unto it, so as that the *edge* of the *cruell blade* meeting with my body, it seemed to me *impossible* I should escape *death*: and I made no other *account* but to be *quite cut off* and *parted* asunder (*Ohel*, p.426).

Trying to understand what sort of force is controlling him he declares: "I stood as one *amazed* [...] trembling and tumbling in my *thoughts*". As suddenly as it appeared to him, "the *sword* [is] gone and *vanisht*," and Rogers is "left in a *labyrinth of fears*". (*Ohel*, pp.423-24) Although this 'experience' has not physically wounded him he is "*wofully wounded within*" for he believes that God must be punishing him for "such *extravagant* and preposterous *expressions* [which have] passed from [him]" (*Ohel*, p.424). He thus "*lay afflicted* and in *continuall fears* after this", and is convinced that God has some terrible fate in store for him, as he writes that "Every *thunder* and *lightning*, I look'd upon as my *fate*, and sent for me; and then would I fall to my *Prayers*" (*Ohel*, p.424). There is a clear parallel between Rogers' story of the sword and the idea of one's eternal fate. Just as Rogers is powerless to prevent the blade of the sword meeting with his body, so he feels powerless to prevent his soul's descent into hell. He admitted that before the vision he was "in sport and idlenesse [...] running with the rest [throwing] out vain words, and *crying*, O Lord! (which we were not suffered to do)" (*Ohel*, p.23). The vision enables him to realise "what a *hard thing* it was to be *saved*", although he derives some

comfort from comparing his state with those who "did live *wickedly*, and carnally in *drunkenesse*, disobedience, *Sabbath-breaking*, and severall sins every *day*" and concluding that his measure of "*grief*" will be less than theirs (*Ohel*, p.24). Though psychologically unstable, Rogers realises, like the medieval women mystics, that knowledge of God will help him save his soul, for he affirms, "I did *covet* to know the *things of God*, and therefore *wished oft I were but a Minister!*" (*Ohel*, p.425). However, in order to do this he has to overcome the sense of himself as a "*poor creature*" (*Ohel*, p.426) which the vision of the sword generated.

Rogers' emotional state at this point corresponds to the state of despair at the beginning of mystical experience. As a manifestation of the state of despair, Rogers' perception of himself as a poor creature is particularly dangerous since one's self esteem can become so low it engenders self-destructive urges. Indeed, Rogers recounted that he "would eat nothing", and was, as he said, "*tempted to murther my self*". And although he "took the *Bible*" in an attempt to comfort himself, his sense of exclusion from God was so great that the Scriptures had the opposite effect: "the more I *read*", he tells his followers,

the more I *roar'd* in the *black gulf* of *despair*, [...] I should *read*, and weep, [...] fall flat (all along) with my face of the *ground*, and cry, and *call*, and sigh, and weep, and *call* for help, but the *Lords time* was not yet come to answer (*Ohel*, pp.426, 427).

He recorded that this state continued, "till at last I was taken and *bound hand and foot*, and held (or tyed) fast in a *bed* till the *raging fits* were over; [...] few that saw me in those *head-long distempers*, did think me at the *best*, fit for any place but *Bedlam*" (*Ohel*, p.429).

Rogers' raging fits gradually "turn more to inward *malady* and *melancholy*", and in this state he experienced a dream of "the *righteousnesse* of *Christ*", when he awoke he declared: "I was so much changed that I was *amazed* at my self, at the

suddenness of it; for I *dream't* I was *comforted*, and my heart *filled* with joy, and when I *awaked* it was so indeed" (*Ohel*, p.431). Overall, Rogers' mysticism is comprised of visions and dreams which are completed by the introspective analysis of his inward self. To a certain extent this is consistent with the mysticism expressed by women mystics, yet the final stage of Rogers' mystical encounter differs from the usual accounts of ecstatic union, as he recalls feeling only the "righteousness" of Christ. Emphasising the absolute goodness of Christ which comforts him, Rogers' mysticism lacks the immediacy of the mystical union experienced by Margery Kempe, St Bridget or Julian of Norwich, and the Fifth Monarchy women who describe an actual level of contact with Christ.

The mystical writing of Fifth Monarchy women, therefore, corresponds to the mysticism of medieval women like St. Bridget and Julian of Norwich, where, as we shall see, physical interaction with Christ is so prevalent. Like Rogers, Anna Trapnel suffered the usual state of despair at the beginning of her mystical experience. Feeling excluded from God, due to what she described as her "blindness of mind and hardness of heart" she believed she was "damn'd, one set apart for destruction, and" she continued, "was strongly tempted to destroy my self, which had not divine power prevented, I had been a murderer of my own life".⁵⁰ She described herself at this stage as one wholly senseless, being rendered spiritually blind, and "struck dumb", she is as one "fast asleep", and is convinced that these are the physical consequences of her inability to perceive God (*Legacy*, p.3). Anna Trapnel's body is therefore understood as a site of evil, and she testifies that she becomes suddenly convinced that

now the unclean spirit would have torn me a pieces, I was so terrified I could not go to bed till midnight, but walked about the chamber hearing nothing, nothing but damnation and hell set before me" (*Legacy*, pp.10-11).

In fact when Trapnel describes a physical assault on her body by Satan, she even hints

at her own complicity: "Satan buffeted, and my own heart strongly set upon me, perswading me that I had fallen from grace" (*Legacy*, p.10). Trapnel's affiliation with the state of despair is glaringly apparent as she is surrounded by a metaphorical blackness, becoming convinced that she is damned. The effect of this on her sense of selfhood is profound, for she affirms that "had that extremity of spirit lasted long, it would have consumed my vitall spirits" (*Legacy*, p.11). Since the body functions as a signifier of mystical experience, the purgative stage in which the mystics "vital spirit" is threatened suggests an erosion of selfhood so extreme it constitutes death.

However, if we understand the blackness in relation to Irigaray's "nocturnal wandering" it enables us to identify the seeming erosion of selfhood in its opposite terms ('*La Mystérique*', p.193). Darkness is the realm of 'unreason' through which the woman mystic must travel in order to experience revelation. In the midst of darkness the woman mystic comes into contact with a "divine force" which is understood simultaneously as the attainment of mystical union and self-knowledge ('*La Mystérique*', p.193). In this way Trapnel is given to understand her individual purity, nobility of soul, and consequently, her worthiness to preach the knowledge she has gained through religious insight. She can therefore claim that "Divine light shewed me the spawn and seed of all sin within my corrupt nature", in order for her to perceive God's grace (*Legacy*, p.5). In this way her "sins innumerable" function to draw her closer to God, and she also preaches the assurance of redemption for all since she understands that "you cannot out-sin mercy" (*Legacy*, pp.6-7). Mercy is of course embodied in the figure of Christ, as well as in her figure of herself.

Trapnel wrote that "the great and glorious God at length throughly convinced me of his justifying ungodly ones, and that he sent Christ not to call the Righteous, but Sinners", like herself. Thus she began to believe in the doctrine of free grace, for she realised that "nothing else could revive me, and I found my spirits a little stayed, in

listening to the free tenders of Christ, and then I was put upon arguing with God, intreating him to give me Christ". Although, like Rogers, Trapnel apprehended that Christ equalled redemption and righteousness, her journey from despair to hope and salvation was accomplished by means of actual dialogue with God. In Trapnel's mystical writing there is therefore a much stronger impression that there is some sort of physical communion between herself and God. She wants Christ for herself, desiring a personal relationship with him to the extent that she argues with God. When she finally receives Christ in mystical union she writes:

I felt, heard and saw that glorious light and power, sounded into my spirit, which caused an eccho, or answer from my spirit in believing the testimony of the Spirit, but that small voice made such a report in my soul, which made me to listen; it was such a speaking that I had not heard before, therefore it was very strange to me; the word I had was this, *Christ is thine, and thou art his*" (*Legacy*, p.7).

Since her earlier feeling of alienation from divinity had manifested itself in a complete lack of sensory perception, it is significant that she now emphasises the sensuality of her experience, as she "felt, heard and saw" the "Spirit" of Christ as he entered her soul in an ecstatic vision of mystical union.

Rogers had written that

after I had solemnized and celebrated my new *life*, (and being begun anew in anothers *righteousnesse*, and in another self) by singing of *Psalmes* (and then I began *Hymns* and *spirituall songs* to my self) and continual open-hearted *returnes of praises*; whilst the *Angels* rejoiced with me" (*Ohel*, p.432).

He thus expressed a feeling of deep contentment, as the Angels rejoiced with him, and the tone of his work is appropriately serene. Compared to Rogers' account of his mystical experience, Trapnel's is impassioned as she recalls "how my soul was enamoured with Christ" and her "heart inflamed". Her rapturous state of pleasure culminates in the idea that she has transcended physical boundaries, as she writes that "earth was now gone, and heaven come" (*Legacy*, p.9).

Like Anna Trapnel, Sarah Wight was "struck both blind, and deafe: her eyes being fast closed up, wrapt up together" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.15). As one "closed up", the image she presents is of one whose senses have been shut off and she is "made uncapable to receive" either spiritual illumination or physical aid. She remained "*three dayes without sight, and neither did eat, nor drinke*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.16). While in this state she also feared she was damned, and she reported that "The devill fights with me" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.19). Once again the body is presented as the site of evil, and Wight consequently believed she was "a poor empty, disconsolate, sinfull, vaine, contemptible worme" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.21). But, again like Trapnel, she does not continue long in this state before she receives a series of visions involving Christ which show her the delights of mystical union. The movement towards divine approbation begins with her repeated statement: "My soule thirsts for the water of life, and I shall have it: My soule thirsts for the water of life, and I shall have it" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.16). The text then comments that "(four times in ardency of spirit [she] utter[ed] those words, then adding) *a little water good people, a little water*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.16). Apart from quenching her physical thirst, water is obviously spiritually significant, particularly since it is associated in the Bible with the cleansing of flesh and spirit. This conflation of spiritual and physical need leads her to focus on the example of Christ who came "from the bosome of his Father, [to] take the nature of man upon him" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.16) in order to save 'man' from eternal damnation:

For a Peter! for a Mary Magdalen! for a Theefe on the Crosse! that none should despaire: a crucified Christ, for a crucified Theefe, [...] a persecuting Saul becomes a beloved Paul: for the chieft sinners... (*Exceeding Riches*, p.17)

Perhaps locating herself among "the chieft sinners", Wight nevertheless feels that she is assured of salvation, especially since she experiences a sensation of union with

Christ, stating: "*Christ came in to me*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.17). She is consequently able to affirm that now "I have what I did desire; I have a crucified Christ: I am full of the Creator" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.31). Nine years after her first mystical experience, Wight referred back to it in *A Wonderful Pleasant and Profitable Letter* (1656). Recalling how 'desirable' Christ was as he appeared to her in her visions, she reveals a further communication between them, with Christ beginning:

*O soul, more then all, to give thee myself, Who am the Desire of Desires, the Beauty of all Blessednesse, the top of all Royalties; even the fulness that filleth all in all; who hath made thee beautifull throw my comlyness: though black in thy self under the bondage of corruption, yet Lovely as Redeemed, Justified, and Sanctified.*⁵¹

Christ affirms her desirability through his. Christ's position as the "Desire of Desires" assures her that she is only made beautiful because of his own "comlyness". Wight's response resonates with sexual excitement, as she declares:

my soul was even melted within me at this sweet and powerful manifestation of love, that I cryed out, None but a *naked Christ*: and who would not sell all for this *Pretious Pearl*, and willingly resigne up all even life it self, to Christ" (*Letter*, p.46).

And, as with Anna Trapnel, Wight confirms that the spiritual interacts with the sensual in the gratification of bodily desire during mystical union when she claims that "none in their creaturely state can conceive of and such a sweet perfume as Christ, which no nose of sense can attain unto [...] for ravishing, pleasant and satisfying and such an imbracing is Christ our soul lover" (*Letter*, pp.57, 58).

The closest Rogers gets to the sensual aspect of mysticism is his statement:

I prefer *Christ* before *Salvation*, and had (if I know my heart) yet not I, (but my *spirituall self*) had rather goe to *Hell* with *Christ* in my *armes* (if 'twere possible) then to *heaven without him*; accounting the *enjoyment* of him to be the *enjoyment* of all the *excellencies* and *happinesse* in *heaven* and *earth*, *Super omnia Christum*; I am very *confident* Christ can't be perfect *without me*, nor I *without him*, but that I shall *appear perfect* (for all Eternity) in Christs *righteousnesse*, and am pardoned by his *death*, purged by his *bloud*, sanctified by his *Spirit*, and saved by his *power* (*Ohel*, p.439).

Both Wight and Trapnel recount the physical and sensual interaction with Christ which Rogers only passively imagines. In fact in the *Letter* Wight alludes to the image of the sword which comprised a key element in Rogers' visionary experience, to show that the reason why Rogers felt alienated from God was because the sword is "the Lords severing sword" which appears "not onely to pierce into our souls, but to divide and sever more between soul and body, flesh and spirit, Christ and Creature" (*Letter*, p.32, 48). Therefore, even though the sword in Rogers' text belongs to the purgative stage of mysticism, Wight's interpretation of the sword image enables us to see that Rogers was placed in a position of disunion with God. As Rogers himself admitted, a continual fear for his soul was his primary motivation in his decision to find God and preach, whereas Anna Trapnel and Sarah Wight were motivated by their desire to join themselves with Christ, as Wight clarifies: "*I would fain have been dissolved, to be with him*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.41). And, as Wight confirmed when she declared her willingness to be dissolved in order to "be with" Christ, for women mystics union with Christ depended upon a negation of self to the extent that they would unhesitatingly dissipate their whole being in order to coalesce with the divine. Thus, Wight can speak of being a "fit" bride for "the Lambe" whereas Rogers is manifestly unwilling to negate his self so completely, positioning himself simply as "A friend of the Bridegroom, and of the Brides" (*Letter*, p.68, *Ohel*, p.216).

Hildegard offered an explanation of the rationale behind the "devout affection of the heart" found in women's mysticism in *Scivias*, where she wrote that it was "because through Him Who is the first and the last, they are brought forth for the usefulness of the faithful".⁵² Even though there does seem to be a continuity of expression in women's mysticism from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, Hildegard's words paradoxically function to highlight an area of difference located in the politics of the Fifth

Monarchy movement. For the Fifth Monarchy women, their 'usefulness' was determined by their level of mystical and prophetic experience. Christopher Feake attested to the fact that Mary Cary's double publication, *The Little Horns Doom and Downfall and New Jerusalem's Glory*, was "brought to me to peruse, with this desire added, that (if I judged it meet) I would prefix a few words, to signifie my judgement concerning the usefulness thereof".⁵³ This he duly did. Henry Jessey proclaimed that "the main Causes urging" him to publish *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced By the Spirit of Grace, in an Empty Nothing Creature, viz. M^{rs} Sarah Wight* arose from the fact that her experience demonstrated "Gods patience, and abundant goodnesse towards this unworthy handmaid, whose *low* and base estate *he* hath regarded" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.iii). His chief cause for publishing her words was that Wight confirmed God's biblical promise that "his *kingdome*, (that *fifth Monarchy*,) [...] *shall stand for ever*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.v).

By doing this Jessey placed the then sixteen-year-old Sarah Wight in a position of some authority and the text gives details of many "*despairing souls*" from all social ranks who sought spiritual comfort from Sarah.⁵⁴ In this way she succeeded in transcending the limiting sphere of her gender and preached God's word. Even John Rogers, who was so careful to acknowledge that within the Fifth Monarchist movement "sisters have equal right with brethren as Members", wrote that they "keep from *publick preaching*, or prophesying, or *teaching* as *Officers* or *Ministers* do" (*Ohel*, p.475). But Sarah Wight makes it quite clear that for women who had achieved mystical union, proclaiming their experience was seen as a moral responsibility:

when thou [Christ] art become the Crown of my glory, the top of all Royalties to me; my spirit now breaths out this language, & says, Holy God, let who will treasure up to themselves, yet will not I: that which some love and store up besides thy self, of their own excellency; I cannot but abhor, & cast away, as filthy raggs of no value: every thing that is in me, that springs up out of my dry ground, that springs not from the sap of thy Holy Spirit. (*Letter*, pp.12-13)

Anna Trapnel clearly shared this point of view when she wrote *A Legacy for Saints*, for believing, "I am married to Christ", she affirmed that God gave her "life to accomplish [her] desire, which is to leave the Saints a Legacy of experiences, that they may read", as she says, "not my works, but the spirits works, and so admire him who is most worthy, when I am gone hence, and shall be no more seen." (*Legacy*, pp.10, 12) And the title page of this text is significant in that it states that her "friends [...] have judged [her work] worthy of publicke view"; elsewhere her words are described as "weighty and precious, for [she] searcheth into the inside of things, and giveth some hint of things now looked for by many", and she is esteemed for "the wisdom and depth of that spirit that is in her" (*Legacy*, p.43). Like Sarah Wight, Trapnel's visions are valued for the fact that they show the "Saints, having encouragement from the Spirit of Truth" (*Legacy*, p.42).

As Christopher Feake's testimony has suggested, Mary Cary was another Fifth Monarchist whose writings were invaluable in demonstrating the divinity of the Saints. Her double publication, *The Little Horns Doom and Downfall*, and *New Jerusalem's Glory*, recalls the founding principle of Hildegard's *Scivias*, for Cary insists that the words are the words of "the spirit of God" (*New Jerusalem's Glory*, p.51). In *A Word in Season* she re-affirms that she is the embodiment of divinity. Here Cary preaches that "all Saints ought to covet the gift of prophesie", and she makes many references to those who are "furnished with the gifts of the spirit", and to those who are authorised by their experience "to preach the Gospel".⁵⁵ Though her message is for "all Saints" her words clearly imply that it is she who is best qualified to preach prophetic learning, and she warns those who may be labouring under "a spirit of error", who may "erre in fundamentals, not knowing Jesus Christ, nor having received his spirit" (*Word*, p.10) as she obviously feels she has. This view is reiterated in the prefatory letter to the 1653

edition of *The Resurrection of the Witnesses*, which she presents as a book of revelations:

The first particular contained in these verses, is the subject matter of this book; and that is expressed in these words, *The Revelation of things that must shortly come to pass, The Word of God, and the Testimony of Jesus Christ*. From whence we may observe [...] That the whole book of the *Revelation*, is a *Revelation*, Declaration, or Manifestation of the mind of God, about the things which were to come to pass shortly after the revealing of it: which Revelation is the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

With the claim that her text "be a *Revelation* or Declaration of the Mind of God", she makes it clear that "the subject matter of this book" involves a sense of divine communication, she also associates her text with the Biblical book of Revelation thereby sharing with that text the distinction of canonical authority. Throughout her texts she uses the language of mysticism to articulate her concerns so that her knowledge of Scripture is utilised to enable her to interpret and gain access to the political sphere.

Despite the value placed on the publications of the Fifth Monarchy women, men associated with the movement, such as Jessey and Rogers, agreed that, for women, mystical experience "suits very well with their sexes" (*Ohel*, p.469). These ominous words encompass the mystery attached to visionary experience. Rogers had once written "I am as far from taking notice of, or having dependence upon *Dreams* or *Visions*, as any man alive".⁵⁷ Perhaps Rogers' innate mistrust of visionary experience is due to the nature of mysticism in that it demands the mutual interaction of the physical with the 'other worldly', but his belief that mysticism is more suited to women also suggests a reluctance on his part to seem sexually attracted to the figure of Christ. Mysticism therefore becomes suited to the female sex since union is sexualised, and also since the feminine is 'other' in that it is positioned as eternally different from the 'rational' male. Rogers therefore reiterates the 'typically male' idea of what it is to be

female: "where they are bad, they are extreame bad; but where they are good, they are exceeding good, and most fondly affected with the *things of God*" (*Ohel*, p.475).

In contrast to this, writing by the Fifth Monarchy women has shown that it is possible for both "good" and "bad" women and men to become, as Rogers puts it "affected with the things of God". Mary Cary put forward the view that anyone, men and women alike, could "search into these deep things of God, that they may glorify" in "wisdome, and knowledge" (*Resurrection*, p.xviii). Likewise, Sarah Wight was careful to ensure that her message included everyone. For Wight maintained that the ultimate achievement of any 'Saint' was "to be a fellow-member of that mysticall body whereof Christ is the Head" since the Saints "love, sympathize, sorrow, and rejoyce together, as members in truth of Christs body" (*Letter*, p.20). Wight even allied the feminised figure of Christ with the injunction for female silence and their experience of oppression in a male dominant society when she wrote that "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he open'd not his mouth; learn of him, for he is meek and lowly, which makes him so unspeakable lovely." (*Letter*, p.40) She thus seems to advocate the very dictates which she is herself transcending by speaking out. But by doing this she actually encodes the idea that women, as 'the Head', are spiritually superior to men, sharing with Christ the values of "*Wisdom* [...] love and amity", traditionally associated with him (*Letter*, pp.67, 75). Indeed Wight also refers to "the treasures of wisdom and knowledg[e]", in which, in an echo of Julian of Norwich, the principle of wisdom becomes "*Wisdom our Mother, which is Christ*" (*Letter*, p.46). In addition to this, as Trapnel points out, women mystics also share his suffering. Just as Christ suffered the death of a martyr, so Trapnel speaks of psychological torment, being "passed by and left [...] wallowing in blood, and pained with wounds" (*Legacy*, p.13). She seems to bear witness to her own religious beliefs by identifying in some measure with Christ's torments.

Implicit in both *Exceeding Riches* and *A Wonderful Pleasant and Profitable*

Letter, as well as in Trapnel's *A Legacy for Saints* is the martyrdom of Christ. Wight meditates on the Passion of Christ, dwelling on his physical torments. Though covered in "sweat, Water and Blood", she sees him as "lovely", and seems filled with loving admiration for him because of his suffering, particularly "when he was scourged, and crowned with Thorns; [and] when he hung on the Cross between two theeves" (*Letter*, p.42). In fact for Trapnel Christ's martyrdom is directly linked to mystical union: "By an act of grace through the blood of the Lord Jesus, which I clearly saw by the light of the Spirit, bearing witness to my Spirit, that Christ was mine, and I was his." (*Legacy*, p.8) It is precisely because "Christ [...] was sacrificed" that Trapnel feels "what a heart inflamed now was mine, filled with the flame of Divine love", and to know what it means "to be imbraced by him, and kissed with the kisses of his mouth" (*Legacy*, pp.9, 16). The emphasis placed on the martyrdom of Christ again suggests the influence of the potent images of Christ's Passion found in the texts by medieval women mystics. John Rogers' interpretation of Christ's sacrifice is typically phlegmatic as he describes how "the Lord satisfied" him by assuring him of his salvation (*Ohel*, p.431).

As we reach the conclusion of this comparative analysis of mystical writing some incontrovertible facts emerge to suggest that it is possible to identify strands of startling similarity in women's mystical writing from the High Middle Ages to the seventeenth century. The pattern of mystical discourse established in the High to Late Middle Ages is divisive according to the gender of the writers. In the male mystical tradition of such writers as Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard Rolle and the *Cloud* author, purgation and despair were featured as methods for the purification of the fundamentally corrupt human body, whereas meditation and contemplation were featured as methods which would assist the mystic in the separation of the spiritual soul from the 'grotesque' physical body. In the female mystical tradition of Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, the divine spirit converges with the female body of the mystic.

The body is therefore authorised as the site of mystical union, and the language of mystical union involves potent images of Christ's Passion. The mystical writing of the Fifth Monarchists clearly engages with purgation and despair in the medieval tradition of male mystics. And in both the intensity of their passion as they describe their experience of union with Christ, and the fervent images of Christ's Passion, the Fifth Monarchist women mystics echo the writing of the women mystics in the High Middle Ages. Perhaps most significantly of all, the writing of the Fifth Monarchy women encompasses the divinity of the human body which allows women to appreciate that their essential nature is loved by 'God', that it is not something which is irredeemably corrupt. This knowledge equates with what in Irigaray's scheme is called the finding of the self, and in turn empowers them so that they can write their experience and articulate their political and religious views ('La Mystérique', p.195).

NOTES

- 1 As Diane Watt notes, Michel de Certeau implies a continuity in religious practices from the Middle Ages into the early modern period in his chapter 'Mystic Speech' in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp.80-100. See Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), p.5.
- 2 Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.11.
- 3 Patricia Crawford, review of Alice Clark's *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1992) in *Gender and History* v (1993), p.304.
- 4 Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.7.
- 5 Judith Bennett, 'Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide' in David Aers (ed.), *Culture and History 1350-1600* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp.147-176, 147.
- 6 Ibid., p.165.
- 7 Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.13.
- 8 Sanford Brown Meech (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), p.6. Hereafter cited in the text as *Kempe*.
- 9 See Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (1654) Wing T2031, TT 112:E730(3), p.3, and *Report and Plea* (1654) Wing T2033, p.50.
- 10 Mary Cary, *The Little Horns Doom and Downfall and A New and More Exact Mappe of New Jerusalem's Glory* (1651) Wing C736, p.xxvii.
- 11 See John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh* (1653) Wing R1813, p.403. Hereafter cited in the text as *Ohel*.
- 12 See Henry Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced* (1647) Wing J687, pp.xiii, 5. Hereafter cited in the text as *Exceeding Riches*.
- 13 See Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.10. The implications of these "matters of difference" with regard to religious belief provide the subject of Chapter 4, which considers the extent to which elements of the Catholic faith cross over into the Protestant one.
- 14 Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.10.
- 15 Ibid., p.2.
- 16 Ibid.

- 17 Louis Martz, *Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, rpt. 1976), p.38.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Quoted in Sarah McNamer, 'The Exploratory Image: God as Mother in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*' in *Mystics Quarterly* 15 (1989), pp.21-28, p.22. McNamer is speaking generally, she gives no references.
- 20 Peter Moor has discussed the theological debate which arises from these ideas. He writes that though the mystical experience suggests a numinous presence that "indeed involves phenomenologically a sense of contact or union with a personal presence felt as loving, powerful, and so on", and though these claims "will be taken to support" the idea of the "existence and attributes of God (or a god)", they can never in themselves "actually close the gap between phenomenology and metaphysics". See Peter Moor, 'Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique' in Steven Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp.101-31, pp.117-18.
- 21 Laura A Finke, 'Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision' in Ulrike Wiethaus (ed.), *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp.28-4, p.36.
- 22 *The Medytacons of Saynt Bernarde* (1496) STC 1916. Hereafter cited in the text as Bernard, *Meditations*.
- 23 Phyllis Hodgson (ed.), *The Cloud of Unknowing and other works*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), p.33. Hereafter cited in the text as *Cloud*.
- 24 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mirrore of Golde*, trans. Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby (1522) STC 6895. Hereafter cited in the text as *Mirrore of Golde*.
- 25 Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp.9-10.
- 26 Sarah McNamer, 'The Exploratory Image', p.22.
- 27 See also Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p.27. In her book of prayers, St. Bridget appealed to Jesus to "enkindle" her desire "to accomplish all good works, and wholly extinguish the heat of all evil concupiscences and worldly affections in me", thus seemingly demonstrating women's own awareness of this system of belief, see, for example, *The Most Devout Prayers of St Brigitte* (1685) Wing B2958.
- 28 See Susan Snyder, 'The Left Hand of God: Despair in the Medieval and Renaissance Tradition' in *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965), pp.18-59, p.23.

- 29 Ibid., p.35.
- 30 Finke, 'Mystical Bodies', p.37.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 The quotations from Julian of Norwich are taken from the Cressy printed text, *XVI Revelations of Divine Love, Shewed to a Devout Servant of our Lord called Mother Juliana, and Anchorette of Norwich* (1670) Wing C6903, p.15. Hereafter cited in the text as *Revelations*. It is believed that Cressy began work on his edition of Julian's *Revelations* sometime after his ordination in 1651 when he was sent as a chaplain to the newly-founded house of English Benedictine nuns in Paris. The only complete manuscripts of the Long Text are post- Reformation. The Paris Manuscript (Biblioteque Nationale fonds anglais MS 40) was written sometime between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As Colledge and Walsh point out, for two centuries after its appearance, Cressy's printed text was the only source of information for scholars. See the introduction to Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (eds.), *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, part one, the Short Text. Studies and Texts 34 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978) for a description and overview of both the Cressy text and the Paris Manuscript. See also this thesis, pp. 87-8.
- 33 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columbia Hart and Jane Bishop, with preface by Caroline Walker Bynum and introduction by Barbara J. Newman *The Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990) Bk1., p.67.
- 34 *Kempe* pp.16,17. In addition to Margery's experience, the sixteenth-century printed text of St. Bridget's *Revelations* contains the story of "a pagan woman which obtayned great grace for the great love she had to her creatour", see *Four revelations of Saint B[rid]get*, [1531?] STC 1915.
- 35 Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Liber Celestis of St. Bridget of Sweden*, vol. 1. Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.51. Hereafter cited in the text as *Liber*.
- 36 From Hildegard of Bingen's *Vita*, quoted in Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.231.
- 37 The actual experience of mystical union St. Bridget is describing here is not her own, it is the Virgin Mary's at the moment of conception, see *Liber*, p.18.
- 38 Luce Irigaray, 'La Mystérique' in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, rpt. 1994), pp.191-202, p.200. Hereafter cited in the text as 'La Mystérique'.
- 39 For a specific account of the "feminine divine" see Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theory of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp.42-88. For detailed studies of Hildegard's 'feminist

agenda' see Prudence Allen, RSM, 'Hildegard of Bingen's Philosophy of Sex Identity' in *Thought* (64) 1989, pp.231-44, Barbara Newman, 'Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation' in *Church History* 54 (1985), pp.163-75, and Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*.

- 40 In her preface to the Paulist Press edition of *Scivias*, Caroline Walker Bynum points out that this contributes to the unique nature of Hildegard's visions, see pp.2-3.
- 41 Mary E. Giles, 'Holy Theatre/Ecstatic Theatre' in Anne Clark Bartlett (ed.), *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1986), pp.117-128, p.120.
- 42 See Giles, 'Holy Theatre', pp.118-119, and Elizabeth Alvida Petroff (ed.), *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). In her introduction to *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* Petroff traces the stages of medieval women's mysticism and argues that visions of the grief of the women at the foot of the cross formed part of the "participatory stage" of their mystical experience.
- 43 Elizabeth Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*' in Linda Lomperis and Sara Stanbury (eds.), *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp.142-67, p.149.
- 44 Paula S Datsko Barker, 'The Motherhood of God in Julian of Norwich's Theology' in *Downside Review* 100 (1982), pp.290-304, p.291.
- 45 Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.4.
- 46 As Diane Watt notes, "Barton and her companions were attainted of treason by a Parliamentary Act which asserts that they maliciously opposed Henry VIII's divorce from Katherine of Aragon and 'traterously attempted many notable actes intendyng therbye the disturbance of the pease and tranquyllytie of the Realme'. " 25 Henry VIII, c. 12 *Statutes of the Realm* ed., A. Luders et al. (1810-1828), pp.iii, 446, quoted in Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.51.
- 47 See Bennett, 'Medieval Women, Modern Women', p.148.
- 48 Ibid., p.164, and Watt, *Secretaries of God*, p.10.
- 49 Elizabeth Avery, *Scripture-Prophecies Opened* (1647) Wing A4272, p.i. Hereafter cited in the text as *Scripture-Prophecies*.
- 50 Anna Trapnel, *A Legacy for Saints* (1654) Wing T2032, TT 806 (1), p.2. Hereafter cited in the text as *Legacy*.
- 51 Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful Pleasant and Profitable Letter* (1656) Wing W2106, TT E1681 (1), pp.45-6. Hereafter cited in the text as *Letter*.
- 52 Hildegard of Bingen, 'The Visions of St. Hildegarde': Extracts from the *Scivias*,

trans. Francesca Maria Steele in Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, pp.151-58, p.157.

- 53 See *The Little Horns Doom and Downfall*, and *A New and More Exact Mappe Or Description of New Jerusalem's Glory* (1651) Wing C736, p.xxvii.
- 54 See Jessey, *Exceeding Riches*, pp.61-85.
- 55 Mary Cary, *A Word in Season* (1647) Wing C739, TT E393 (26), p.7. Hereafter cited in the text as *Word*.
- 56 See, for example Mary Cary, *The Resurrection of the Witnesses* (1653) Wing C737, TT E719(2), pp.4-5. Hereafter cited in the text as *Resurrection*.
- 57 John Rogers, *Jegar-Sahadvtha: An Oyled Pillar* (1657) Wing J1809, TT E 919(9), pp.29-30.

CHAPTER FIVE

EMPTY NOTHING CREATURES: NEGATION AND THE FIFTH MONARCHY WOMEN

For women mystics the belief that their bodies are loved by 'God' is the belief which empowers them so that they can write their experiences, yet this is not unproblematic. The notion that women are vessels of divine control was as pervasive in the seventeenth century as it had been in the High Middle Ages. Referring to the mystical experiences of Sarah Wight, Henry Jessey claimed that the individual "is but an *Earthen vessel, born in sin*".¹ For Jessey the idea that the human body is predisposed to "sin", corrupt in its very physicality is incorporated into the issue of women's negation of self. And indeed the Fifth Monarchy women were virtually synonymous with the term 'empty nothing creature'. The first example of this appeared in 1647 with the publication of Sarah Wight's mystical experience. The title page of this, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced By the Spirit of Grace, in an Empty Nothing Creature, viz. M^{rs} Sarah Wight*, gives us her name but not before affirming her status as an "empty nothing creature". And in her various writings, Anna Trapnel frequently projects an image of herself as the empty vessel being filled up by God, as she writes, for example, that "the Lord filled me with many spiritual hymns", and makes specific references to the pourings "forth" of "a vessel that is altogether unlikely that any such liquor should enter into it".² Echoing Henry Jessey, John Rogers affirmed in *Ohel* that women were Gods "weakest contemptible vesse/s" and claimed that mysticism "suits with" the female sex.³

The juxtaposition of women, sin, weakness, and vessel in the writings of both Rogers and Jessey demonstrates that they associate the idea of the empty nothing creature with women's essentially inferior position in relation to men. How did this

notion affect the authorial position of the Fifth Monarchy women, and how are we to understand these women's self-representation as vessels? Do the gender specifics of mystical writing confirm the position of women like Anna Trapnel or Sarah Wight as empty vessels which lack the power of authorial control? In answering these questions this chapter explores selfhood and subjectivity in the writing of the Fifth Monarchy women, giving, in the final section, consideration to Luce Irigaray's 'La Mystérique' and the move towards self-empowerment. In focusing its argument on perceptions of the Fifth Monarchy women writers as "empty nothing creatures", this chapter develops work by such feminist critics as Sue Wiseman, Hilary Hinds and Diane Purkiss.

The visionary experiences of women like Sarah Wight and Anna Trapnel tap into a tradition of female religiosity that is centred on the coalescence of the self with a divine spirit. This coalescence impinges on the issue of female authorship since it begs the question: is the female subject a conscious author figure, or is responsibility for authorship displaced onto the figure of "God"? Sue Wiseman is among those who have considered the extent to which women's writing in the seventeenth century was publicly acceptable, pointing out that the Pauline interdictions against women's speech and the issue of women's identity

intersect at the place where women's speech is most visibly gendered and therefore prohibited - the public sphere of the written or spoken word - and the place where women, if they are accepted as prophets, are most not themselves in that they are speaking 'for' (in favour of, but also more literally on behalf of) God.⁴

Critical attempts to resolve the paradoxical nature of female authorship in this period, with its simultaneous assertions and denials of authorship, have tended to focus on ideas concerning female modesty and forms of self-empowerment. The "modesty topos" suggests that the concept of women as empty vessels arose from a code of behaviour which emphasised propriety. As a customary code of behaviour the negative connotation associated with the notion of the female author as an

empty vessel is less problematic. Alternatively, it has been argued that women writers of visionary texts deliberately emphasised their position as vessels of divinity in order to appropriate Godly power. Following this idea, critics have suggested that the very act of negating authorship is a political challenge to authority in that it is disruptive and subverts gender distinctions and is therefore tantamount to self-empowerment. In order to explore female empowerment within the Fifth Monarchist movement it is necessary to consider these ideas with specific reference to the Fifth Monarchists.

The Empty Nothing Creature and the Modesty Topos

Keith Thomas argues that Mary Cary's declaration:

I am a very weak, and unworthy instrument and have not done this work by any strength of my own, but have been often sensible of my own insufficiency to do anything as of my self

exemplifies the use of the modesty topos.⁵ Another form of this appears at the beginning of Sarah Wight's *A Wonderful Pleasant and Profitable Letter* (1656), which tells the reader that it was printed "without her *knowledge or consent*".⁶ Both of these examples support the assumption that the modesty topos is a characteristic feature of women's writing, yet it was a phenomenon that was also associated with male writers. As Keith Thomas warns, we "should not over-emphasise [Cary's] objection", after all, as he points out, "Cromwell said the same sort of thing about his victories in battle without it noticeably detracting from their effect".⁷ Also, the respected Puritan minister John Pordage's work, *Theologia Mystica* was published posthumously "according to the said Author's Intent and Desire in his Life time", and includes an apology for the fact that he "writes in an unknown way and unusuall Method. And therefore at first reading the stile and the expressions of it may seeme something unpleasant".⁸ It seems then that male writers also felt compelled to offer elaborate justifications for their texts. As Wendy Wall points out, in the complex

privilege was afforded to writers who circulated their works privately within elite circles; all writers who risked estrangement from the social sources of power when they chose to publish. Public writing was aligned with the increasingly more mobile social groups who posed a threat to the institution of patronage. It was not just female modesty, but aristocratic practice, that discouraged authorship.⁹

For many, publication was an ignoble and discreditable act, and the level of reproach which writers feared could be attached to them if they were seen to be complicit in the publication of their work has led some critics to explore the idea of the 'stigma of print' in some detail.¹⁰ However, as Thomas points out, in the case of women writers it seems "that the language in which such writing was couched must have served to perpetuate the legend of women's inferiority."¹¹

Some of the perceptions governing notions of women's inferiority were sexual. As many seventeenth-century texts suggest, the public or "unbridled speech" of women signified unchastity.¹² This belief was compounded by the plethora of conduct manuals aimed at women which enforced the assumption that women were fundamentally wayward.¹³ Women writers throughout the early modern period, Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, and Anne Finch, to name only a few, were certainly aware that publishing their work was considered an immodest act which would leave them open to accusations of lewd conduct. Even though the relaxation of censorship in the 1640s and 50s enabled more women to access the public, political sphere as their work was printed, the perception of women who published did not change. Assuming responsibility for one's text remained a radical act for women. As Mary Eagleton points out, throughout literary history women writers have been tormented by "an anxiety about their chosen role and how they are perceived".¹⁴

In order to safeguard their reputation women writers invariably prefaced their work with apologies and assertions of their intellectual inferiority. An Collins, for example, drew attention to the “defects” and “error” of her poetry due to her “want of art”. “Some may desirous be,” she wrote,

...to understand
What moved me, who unskilful am herein,
To meddle with, and thus to take in hand,
That which I cannot well end or begin.¹⁵

Conscious of a lack of skill, they also sought to avoid accusations that they wrote for their own glory, as the anonymous author of *Eliza's Babes* demonstrates. “And if any unlike a Christian shall say: I wrote them, for mine own glory, I like a Christian will tell them: I therefore sent them abroad”. Referring to her poems as the offspring of a union with divinity, she tells her readers

Looke on these Babes as none of mine,
For they were but brought forth by me;
But look on them, as they are Divine,
Proceeding from Divinity.¹⁶

Perpetuating, as Keith Thomas noted, the 'legend of women's inferiority', Sarah Wight commented on the print history of her earlier text, *Exceeding Riches*, in *A Wonderful Pleasant and Profitable Letter*, stating: “I was not then capable of the publishing of it: if I had I could not be free, fearing how it might be with me afterwards” (*Letter*, p.24). Seeming to harbour the conviction that publishing was an immodest act, Wight fears that the damnation of her immortal soul would be the consequence of any complicity on her part in the publication of her work. Although *Exceeding Riches* was immensely popular, going through eight editions between 1647 and 1658, Wight's perception of her self as a “true-divine soul” forbade her to publish, and therefore to “boast” of, her own work (*Letter*, pp.5, 12). God, she affirms, has “become the Crown of my glory, the top

of all Royalties to me" (*Letter*, p.12). Emphasising her humility before God, it appears that Wight did not wish to be perceived to exert any control over the publication of her work. Her chief desire is to conduct herself in "an humble, melting manner" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.3).

Thus it seems that these women writers negated their gender identity in order to render their work acceptable, both socially, in conjunction with the criteria for 'proper' female behaviour set out for women in texts such as Anthony Stafford's *The Femall Glory* (1635), and spiritually. Overall, the idea of the modesty topos appears credible. As a strategy for further understanding the social preconceptions which governed print culture it is certainly useful. It explains negativity in terms of an overriding sense of propriety, though this sense of propriety functions to reaffirm the notion that women were inferior beings, and suggests that women were subject to restraint and repression. In turn, this suggests passivity, and invests women's writing in this period with a desire to be seen as neither excessive nor extreme. Of course, this is in contradistinction to the religious fervour and political opinions expressed by women such as the Quakers Margaret Fell, Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, as well as the Fifth Monarchy women. Rather than dismissing the deeply complex issue of self-negation in the texts of women radicals as exclusively a gesture of modesty, we need to explore all of the possibilities associated with women's self-negation. For the Fifth Monarchy women religious extremism is a crucial factor, as is their political involvement with the Fifth Monarchy movement, in ascertaining how their position as writing subjects was constructed.

Self-Negation as Suicide

For women writers of devotional prose social acceptance was obviously a factor as their work was published. However, their relationship with 'God' was also supremely

important. For women associated with the Fifth Monarchy movement the realisation of their words and ideas in print was complicated by the fact that they subordinated themselves before God. As a manifestation of their mystical relationship with 'God', the writing of the Fifth Monarchy women evinces two forms of self-negation. They disclaimed responsibility for authorship, and sometimes attempted literally to annihilate themselves by committing suicide. As I pointed out in chapter four of this thesis, the purgative stage of the mystical journey towards 'God' deals with the means of bodily purification and arises from the belief in one's physical corruption. If we look at the Fifth Monarchy women who attempted self-destruction it becomes apparent that they do so as a means of purgation.

In the account of her visionary experiences in John Rogers' *Ohel*, Elizabeth Avery recalls feelings of spiritual isolation, stating that she

could not *joyn with them* [fellow worshipers], nor *hear*, nor *pray*, nor had no *rest*, no *comfort*, nor *ease*, nor could I *eat* or *drink*, but went (as I was wont) to *bewail* in a *Garden*, where I was *moaning* (*Ohel*, p.405).

A sense of exclusion clearly prevents her from joining in communal worship and prayer, thus leading her towards a state of despair. In religious terms the state of despair means to be without hope of salvation, and Avery does indeed testify to the fact that she felt herself to be "in such a condition [as] to see *Gods wrath* in every thing against [her]", and she consequently believes that "*God would be glorified by my destruction*" (*Ohel*, p.405). She goes on to state that "when *my faith was gone*, and *hope gone*, and *all gone*, and *flew from me*, [...] yet *love remained*" (*Ohel*, p.405). Rogers adds an editorial note at this point in order to comment on the "Effects of Christs call, a true and strong love" (*Ohel*, p.405), thereby asserting that there remained a bond between Elizabeth Avery and 'God' in spite of her despairing state. This bond is therefore significant since it prevents Avery from seeking "the *destruction* of the *flesh*" (*Ohel*, p.406) by denying herself food and drink even though she "had *no assurance of*

salvation" (*Ohel*, p.405). She offers an explanation for this in her subsequent description of purgation, illumination and union. Sensing that "*light was near at hand*", she realises that it "*was sin suffering in me, and the flesh as the punishment of sin*" (*Ohel*, p.405). Punishing the inherently sinful flesh to save the spirit, she becomes eager to communicate her mystical experience and learning: "Then I *writ down* what *God had done* for me, and *writ* about to *my friends*" (*Ohel*, p.406). Avery's understanding of mysticism transforms what seems to be at the outset a wholly negative experience of isolation and self-negation into one of self-empowerment as she writes, publishes, and speaks of it "standing in the *midst* of this *Church*", thereby making her declaration and achieving her "desire to be *one*" (*Ohel*, p.406) with the community of worshipers.

As Avery's experience suggests, in the mystical tradition fasting is a means of bodily purification, and Henry Jessey also engages with this in *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced* where he details Sarah Wight's intake, or lack of, "sustenance":

These 53 dayes together, shee hath taken no outward sustenance at all, but onely two or three or foure cups of fair water at a time & once of late a little broth, (and casting it up again, unable to keep it,) and taking this also onely once in two dayes, or in three dayes or more, between the times of her taking thereof, never taking it two dayes together: And yet shee looks better now, then shee did seven or eight weeks agoe (*Exceeding Riches*, p.21).

At this point Jessey is unable to offer a rational explanation as to why Sarah "looks better" after her period of fasting than she did before her visionary trance "seven or eight weeks" earlier when she was, presumably, in a state of perfect physical health.

In a similar experience of self-starvation Anna Trapnel is reported to have taken no food for the entire period of her trances, and the comment on this suggests a spiritual explanation for the mystics improved physical condition, as we saw in Sarah Wight's case: "I durst not eat or drink", declared Trapnel, "because it was said to me, if thou doest, thou worshippest the Devil" (*Cry*, p.8). Here Trapnel senses that eating

feeds an evil within her. She therefore denies herself food in order to avoid nourishing this inner evil. In *The Cry of a Stone* Anna Trapnel recounts how she fasted for "nine days, nothing coming within my lips" (*Cry*, p.5). Indeed, Wight expresses the same ideas as she explains to a "maid in deep despair [who] came to her" for comfort: "If I did eat, I was terrified for it. Sometimes I durst not drink in a whole week together: because I judged, it was a Cup of Devils, and I drank to Devils, if I drank: and if I did eat, I thought I did eat my own damnation" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.109). Refusing their bodies nourishment brings both Wight and Trapnel closer to 'God'. In an exchange between Sarah Wight and Henry Jessey in *Exceeding Riches* this situation is further clarified:

Bodily sustenance being offered to her, shee not having eaten any thing at all during twenty-four dayes past, nor drunke any thing at all but fair water, and but very little of that. Shee thus answered: *Doe you think, I doe not eat? How doe you think I live?* Being asked, what shee did eat? Shee said; *No eye of man sees it, but the eye of God. None could tast the sweetnesse of the Manna, by looking on it, none but they that eat it: or of the Honey out of the Rock.* (*Exceeding Riches*, p.33)

Having, at this point, gone without food for twenty-four days, the reason why "she looks better now" is perfectly clear in her assertion that she has tasted "the sweetnesse of the Manna" and been nourished spiritually. Though potentially fatal, fasting was understood as a means of increasing one's religiosity rather than as a form of attempted suicide, which was not only illegal in the seventeenth century, but would also ensure the subject's eternal damnation since suicidal behaviour signalled an alienation from God.

The association between food and an inner evil expressed by both Wight and Trapnel nevertheless reveals a fear that the mystic might be seen to be complicit in her wickedness and corruption. Both Wight's and Trapnel's experience of the purgative stage also encompassed several visions which convince them temporarily that, because of the corruptibility of their bodies, they are indeed damned, and this

leads them to try self-slaughter. Trapnel, for example, later explained:

I was tortured in my body, as if he [Satan] had the full possession thereof, and [...] being forced by Sathan to walk up and down the fields, attempting to throw my self into a Well, [...] And again frequently I took Knives to bed with me, to destroy my self (*Cry*, pp.5,8).

As Michael MacDonald points out, self-murderers are portrayed in a diverse array of sources as people who had turned away from God and yielded to the temptations of the Fiend.¹⁷ Trapnel is certainly aware of the dangerous probabilities of yielding to the fiend when she writes: "we have within us such a corrupt spirit, which proves such a treacherous enemy, it betrays us into the hands of Satan".¹⁸ Likewise, Sarah Wight almost succumbed when, "being condemned in her selfe [she] attempted wickedly to destroy her selfe, as by drowning, strangling, stabbing [...] and wounding her self" (*Exceeding Riches*, pp.7-8).

Suicidal urges such as Wight's and Trapnel's seem to develop from a belief in their fundamental impurity, thus the resolution to kill themselves can be equated, not so much with a deliberate turning away from God, as with the temptation to despair of God's mercy and to abandon all hope of salvation. Along with the body as the site of mystical experience and eroticised pleasure is a hatred of their physicality clearly inferred from these masochistic attacks on their bodies. Thus the identification and interpretation of the body as a signifier of different levels of mystical experience is problematised by the sort of self-hatred evinced by Trapnel and Wight, as the methods of 'purification' demand their complicity in ultimate forms of self-negation. Of course it is possible to understand some of these methods of 'purification' in terms of self-empowerment, since these women assume the power of control over their bodies through their decision not to eat. The fasting of Elizabeth Avery certainly initiates a process of self-empowerment. Being unable to eat or drink, Avery clearly fasted, but she did not reveal any specific self-destructive urge. Even though she referred to the

destruction of her body she did not act against herself in the way that both Wight and Trapnel did. Her feeling that "love remained" sustained her as she suffered in her despair enabling her to resist any attempt at self-slaughter.

Authorisation and Authorial Identity

Nevertheless, as speaking and writing subjects women mystics appeared as unstable entities at the same time as their work was, to a certain extent, deemed socially and theologically acceptable on the basis that their particular sect authorised them. For Fifth Monarchist women writers this is particularly significant. In contrast to other Puritan groups, the Fifth Monarchy politicised mysticism by incorporating it into its ideology. As Nigel Smith points out, since the Saints emphasised mystical illumination through visionary experience, they were prone to accept the transmission of the Word through dreams and visions as an equal or superior authority to the Bible.¹⁹ Thus, the unique visionary experiences of women like Trapnel and Wight were fundamental to this millenarian movement. This is distinctly different to other groups, such as the Diggers.

Phyllis Mack points out that during the Civil War and Interregnum there were no Digger women prophets.²⁰ Indeed the contempt with which women visionaries were regarded by this movement is indicated by Winstanley in a letter to Eleanor Davies. "[Y]ou have lost the breeches, your reason, by the inward boiling vexation of your spirit" he claims, "and that inward power shall chain you up in darkness".²¹ Even the Quakers who were reputed to be sympathetic to female prophecy had difficulty authorising women's independent public activities, and the writing of many (male) radicals reveals anxieties about the empowerment of women through prophetic and visionary experience.

Francis Rous's 1653 tract, *The Misticall Marriage*, epitomises seventeenth-century views of the relationship between God and the individual, and which, like the conduct manuals, assumes the indelible inferiority of women. His preface reiterates that the “*main end*” or aim of every individual is to enforce “*Gods glory*”.²² Rous's mysticism, in which “*the souls of the Saints, living here below*” enjoy the “*mystical love which droppeth downe from the Head Christ Jesus*”, reinforces the idea of a natural order. He affirms, for instance,

I am a spirit, though a low one, and God is a spirit, even the highest one, [...] where should a low spirit find happinesse but in the spirit the highest spirit? and where should a created spirit feel happinesse but in the Spirit that created it? (*Misticall Marriage*, p.2)

Since the soul is gendered as feminine, and Rous is clear that he is describing “the heavenly marriage betweene a *Soule and her Saviour*”, his treatise deals implicitly with constraints on women (*Misticall Marriage*, title page). And he writes that the “Lambs Wife” must beware that her “body should draw down the soul to the grosse and transitory things that are given to serve the body” (*Misticall Marriage*, p.5). That Rous associates all things “grosse” with the feminine is evident throughout. “Lust and carnality”, he argues, are as “monstrous, as between a woman and a beast; slavish, as between a woman and a tyrant; mischevious & mortall, as between a woman and a serpant” (*Misticall Marriage*, pp.33-4). And he carefully explains the laws of adultery. According to Rous, before a married woman can even consider mystical union,

she must be freed from the law of her old husband by his death, before shee can come to be subject to the law of the new. Her old husband was concupiscence, to whom she was married in carnall generation, and this husband must be slaine, and put off by death, if Christ-Iesus the new and true husband of the soule shall be put on in regeneration (*Misticall Marriage*, p.19).

Likewise, George Fox calls for “Wives” to submit themselves to their “Husbands as unto the Lord”, since, he argues, “[t]he Husband is the head of the Wife, even as Christ is the

head of the church".²³ Despite his advocacy of female prophecy manifest in his admonishment of those who demanded women's silence, he maintained that "Wives [must] be subject to their own Husbands in every thing" (*Women*, p.2). On one hand Fox warned those "that make a scoff & a wonder at a Womans declaring [...] let all your mouths be stopt for ever, that despise the spirit of prophesie in the daughters", believing that

every one receiving the Light which comes from Christ, shall receive the spirit of prophesie, whether they be male or female, and the spirit of prophesie is the Testimony of Jesus; if the male and female have received the Testimony of Jesus, they have received the spirit of prophesie (*Women*, pp.5-6).

On the other hand, he also reiterated woman's subjection to man: "Let your women learn in silence, with all subjection; [...] I suffer not a woman to Teach, nor to usurp Authority over the man" (*Women*, p.1). Transposing Rous's mystical terms into physical realities Fox affirms social and familial hierarchies.

As an integral part of the Fifth Monarchy female prophets Anna Trapnel and Mary Cary did possess a certain authority which enabled them to preach their visionary learning. It must be noted however, that although the organisation's sympathetic attitude to women's marginalised position was widely acknowledged, the relationship between the women and the movement to which they belonged was not unproblematic. The popular Fifth Monarchist preacher John Rogers declared, for example, that "most men doe arrogate a Sovereignty to themselves which I see no warrant for." In the Church of the Fifth Monarchy "all the Members, even Sisters as well as Brothers, have a right to all Church-affairs" (*Ohel*, p.563). However, while on the subject of the Pauline interdictions against women's speech, Rogers stated:

I know the ordinary objection is objected out of 1 Cor. 14.34,35. *Let your women keep silence in the Church*, ... which is that they keep from *publick preaching*, or prophesying, or *teaching as Officers or Ministers* do; ... Now we plead not for this; but for the common ordinary liberty due to them as *members of the Church*, viz. to speak, [...] with the rest' (*Ohel*, p.475).

“Now we plead not”, says Rogers, for women to preach publicly or prophesy publicly, or teach “as *Officers* or *Ministers* do”. In other words, Rogers is drawing distinctions between public and private speech, maintaining that it is acceptable for women to speak within the church, within the confines of this patriarchal system. Thus within the movement which authorised women there existed fundamental problems associated with gender. Of course these problems were not unique to the Fifth Monarchists, but the issue of authorisation and gender was a particularly important one for them since a denial of women's empowerment through divine agency was in opposition to their founding ideology.

Crucially, since the Fifth Monarchists believed in the imminent arrival of King Jesus, necessitating the downfall of all earthly monarchies, they differed from other sectarian groups, such as the Quakers, or the Ranters, in that their goals were political as well as religious. Believing that human worth depended on nobility of the soul rather than nobility of birth, the Fifth Monarchists drew extensive support from those at the lower end of the social scale. As Mary Cary wrote, those that “doe covet to treasure up most riches for themselves, [...] kings, Princes, and evill Governours,” shall become the “basest and vilest”, as the Saints who seek only “the public weale, and safety, and happinesse, and salvation of all” (*New Jerusalems Glory*, pp.56-7, 62, 56). Not only would those in authority be overthrown, they would be replaced by those who were thus far powerless. Since women were literally powerless, traditionally marginalised and forbidden access to public speech, the manifestation of divinity in the likes of Anna Trapnel or Sarah Wight was evidence that Fifth Monarchist ideas were being realised.

Women mystics like Sarah Wight were encouraged to “vindicate their *liberty*, prove their right to the *Ordinances of Christ*, either by speaking, pleading, prophecying,

or the like, and declaring their *visions* of truth", but they were still acknowledged to be Gods "weakest contemptible *vessels*" (*Ohel*, p.465, 464). Thus, although Fifth Monarchists allowed women 'the right to vote, offer, object, [...] or such like", the movement insisted on a distinction not only between preaching and prophesying but between prophesying as a leader of the church and as a "mere" vessel of God (*Ohel*, p.567). Henry Jessey persistently emphasised Sarah Wight's status as an "*Earthly Vessel* of conveyance", encouraging the popular readership to see her in the same way: "Exalt the Lord Creator alone", he says, "and not the Creature: Say not, *What a one is shee?* but, *What a God is he?*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.156) Once again we are confronted with Jessey's affirmation that Wight is merely the empty nothing creature. Thus it seems that the paradoxical nature of the Fifth Monarchist attitudes towards its women writers mirrored the women's own attitudes towards themselves as writers.

What are the implications of men's negation of women's authorial identity? The most obvious answer seems to be that men like Jessey were manipulating women's texts for their own ends. Aged sixteen years old Sarah Wight was propelled onto the public stage with Henry Jessey's account of her first mystical experience, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced*. Lying comatose for long periods of time between April and July 1647, she appears to have had little authorial control, as her mystical experience of purgation, illumination and union emphasises her status as an "empty nothing creature" speaking only God's word. And even though Jessey was quite clear that Wight's "own very words [were] being here writ down, and kept close unto; the most part of them being first writ whilst shee spake," her experience was tailored by him to fit his political campaign as a preacher of Fifth Monarchist beliefs. Indeed, Jessey was acclaimed for utilising Sarah's mystical experience for political ends by his "cosin", John Saltmarshe, whose letter telling Jessey that he did "well thus

to watch the *appearances* of God in *his*, and to publish them to the Saints”, is published as a preface to *Exceeding Riches*.²⁴ For the Fifth Monarchists, Sarah’s communion with ‘God’ was another sign which proved their beliefs. For Sarah herself, the first text which publishes her visionary learning seems to have found a market only because it was legitimised by Jessey and the Fifth Monarchy movement.

Jessey's aim was clearly to encourage widespread confidence and support for the new Fifth Monarchy movement. In this aim Jessey had to tread cautiously since the Saints saw the millennium as a social revolution, and their enemies accused them of seeking to annihilate the upper levels of society. He accordingly detailed the number of visitors to Sarah's bedchamber, actually naming, for the purposes of publication, the most socially and politically significant, and stating, moreover, that

Many more might be named, who have seen her of late, and have been much affected in hearing of the Lords wonderfull workings, in, and towards her: But these [those named] are sufficient to witnesse what they have seen, or heard, and beleeve: many of them being persons of note, and of much esteem in *London* amongst them that fear the Lord. The *naming* of them, the Relator desires may not be offensive to *any* of them, seeing 'tis done for the more assuring this great and *memorable* worke of Gods mercy, to some that [...] will not *beleieve* it, unlesse (at least) they may speak with some, that have been *present* with her. (*Exceeding Riches*, p.10)

Jessey thus assures the general readership as to the truth of "this great and memorable work" at the same time as he fortifies the Fifth Monarchist cause by using Sarah Wight's visionary experience as evidence "of the Lords wonderfull workings" on behalf of the Fifth Monarchists. Exploiting the fact that the publication of *Exceeding Riches* was supported by the powerful and influential, Jessey clarified that “[t]he reason of naming many” was “that some more incredulous, might sooner beleieve, and reap benefit, and not reject the mysteries of God” (*Exceeding Riches*, p.xvi).

With *Exceeding Riches* Jessey used a framework of devotional literature to communicate a personal political message, that “all enemies being subdued, and wars ceasing, [...] edifying love may so abound among all Saints, that *all may know*

who are Christs Disciples, by the love they have one towards another' (*Exceeding Riches*, p.v). During a time of national crisis Sarah's mystical experience offered the promise of "assured hopes", of a "joyfull time in the midst of present feares, [and] difficulties" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.v). Confined to her bed in a weakened physical state, "being now struck both blind, and deafe: her eyes fast closed", Sarah Wight presents an image of extreme passivity which suggests that she was vulnerable to manipulation by Jessey (*Exceeding Riches*, p.15). It seems that Jessey was therefore free to function as interpreter, editing and consequently altering the meaning of Wight's text. Indeed one way of understanding mediated texts like *Exceeding Riches* is in terms of scribism. In *Exceeding Riches* Jessey, as the male scrivener, is the dominant figure, offering up the prophetic words of the woman in the visionary trance. Although making the assertion that Sarah's words have been faithfully transcribed, the male author presents us with a carefully constructed image of a woman, one which is suited to his purpose, in this case it is of the empty nothing creature who receives the 'divine spirit'.

Sarah's experience certainly proved Jessey's Fifth Monarchist belief in a moral hierarchy in which those, like Sarah "whose *low* and base estate *he* hath regarded: *He causing LIGHT to shine out of DARKNESS*, (2 Cor. 4.6)", received divine blessing (*Exceeding Riches*, p.iii). Convinced by both his own arguments and by the potency of Sarah's mysticism, he consequently expressed his joy that Sarah's visionary learning demonstrated that "the God of Heaven" had begun the process of "setting up his *kingdome* (that *fifth Monarchy*,) *that shall stand for ever*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.v). Indeed, in his address at the beginning of *Exceeding Riches* Jessey writes that he "rejoyceth in the *Lord*, who hath put such an opportunity as this into my hand, of Publishing to you, and to others" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.i).

Nor was Jessey alone in seizing such an opportunity. In his prefatory letter,

'To the Christian Reader', Jessey refers to another book which describes the visionary experience of a woman by a certain Dr. Homes:

Praise the Lord for leaving such Patterns of his Riches of Grace, [as that of Mrs Drake Revived, and that of Gods gracious thoughts, towards great sinners, (by D^r Homes;) in a late Book, so called] (Exceeding Riches, p.iv).

Assuming that women function merely as templates through which 'God' can pattern 'His' "riches of grace", Jessey's glee here is obvious. As he clearly understands it, "the Lord" makes women conduits or models for the divine word so that men, like himself, can interpret them.

The seeming passivity of the women visionary in a trance-like state also presents male authors with an opportunity for self-glorification. John Rogers was another male author who participated in this scribal convention. Writing *Ohel* in order to promote the idea of Church discipline, his selected compilation of 'experience' testimonies from his parishioners is tantamount to self-glorification as they invariably affirm how "*much comforted*" they are "*since Mr. Rogers came hither*" (*Ohel*, p.410). Most of these testimonies come from women who have suffered in the traumatic civil war period. We are informed, for example, from Frances Curtis that:

In these wars I was stripped by the Rebels (being abroad) and came home so, thorough sad tempests, and since have gone thorough great troubles, ... my Husband was killed by the Rebels, ... and in a few days I was turned out of doors, with my childe in my arms. (Ohel, p.410)

If John Rogers exploited the experiences of these women to secure his position as Fifth Monarchist preacher, then it was a successful ploy. As Frances Curtis asserted: "I have received much sweet *satisfaction* by Mr. R., which makes me so [...] *desire* to be a *member* with his *people*, in his *Church*" (*Ohel*, p.411). Like Henry Jessey, Rogers assumed a scribal role on behalf of his female congregants, taking down "A fuller Testimony" (*Ohel*, p.403) on their behalf. As in the case of Elizabeth Avery, for instance, Rogers insists that their testimonies were taken "*out of [their] own mouth[s]*"

in order to reaffirm his Fifth Monarchist beliefs in "*Free-grace*" for everyone (*Ohel*, pp.402-06). Of course, as the testimony of Elizabeth Avery indicated in the consideration of self-negation as suicide, women visionaries are less passive than they appear, yet they were faced with men's assumption that their words could be manipulated by male scribal figures. In *Ohel* such manipulation is manifest in the report of Elizabeth Chambers' experience which took place in Dublin. Rogers adds an editorial note to explain the personal significance of her testimony, stating that

This Gentlewoman declared to several Church-Members, that before the Author came over [from England], she had in a dream one night of her troubles, a vision of him so plainly, that after he was in *Dublin*, the first Serm[on] he preached, she told her friends this was the man that God had declared to her in a vision, should comfort her soul (*Ohel*, p.406).

The text goes on to reiterate the fact, as Rogers sees it, that he was her particular saviour, reporting that Elizabeth Chambers was in a despairing state before Rogers arrived, with no other minister able to help her. Remaining "*without assurance*" and with "*no full and clear satisfaction*" she believes that her prayers have been answered when Rogers arrives: "*the Lord, who heareth prayers, sent over Mr. Rogers from the Council of State*" (*Ohel*, p.407). Rogers' self-glorification here is explicit and over an unspecified period of time Rogers convinces Elizabeth Chambers that she is able to commune with 'God'. Even though her sister dies after a long illness, she affirms that she "*fed on Christ*", so that the more she suffers, "*the more the Lord hath taken away from me, as my Husband, Father, Friends, Sister, Children, and all; the more have I made Christ in me, in the room and stead of all these to me*" (*Ohel*, p.408). Overall, Rogers' message is that she is "*a good example to women*" (*Ohel*, p.407), submitting herself to his power she is effectively "*made an Instrument [...] To do others good*" (*Ohel*, p.408). Rogers certainly ensures that she does him good as her words augment his position as a Fifth Monarchist minister. As scribal figures Rogers and

Jessey clearly occupied a position of some power, playing a major role in textual dissemination. In Jessey's case, this ensured the popularity of the text and its position in the community, whereas in Rogers' case this ensured his popularity and position in communities as far apart as London and Dublin. As scribes to women such as Sarah Wight and Elizabeth Avery, Henry Jessey and John Rogers establishes their credibility by literally authorising them.

Forms of Self-Empowerment

Since Sarah Wight and Elizabeth Avery seem to submit themselves willingly to the control of prominent male figures, these women are seen to be complicit in their manipulation. Like Wight's *Exceeding Riches*, Anna Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone, or a Relation of Something Spoken in Whitehall* (1654) is relayed to the reader via an anonymous scribal figure who claims that "her Manifestations of light and love, in Visions and Revelations of things to come" is presented to the reader "in the following Narration, taken from her own mouth." (*Cry*, p.2) She is initially presented as passive, "lying in bed with her eyes shut, her hand fixed, seldom seen to move, she delivered in that time many and various things; speaking every day, sometimes two, three, four and five hours together" (*Cry*, p.2). The anonymous preface states that "it was the desire of this Maid to present her Testimony to you, though it is not for you only, but for all" (*Cry*, p.ii). This is significant for its assertion that Trapnel wants her voice to be heard, it is her "desire" that it is presented "for all". For women like Wight, Avery and Trapnel, having their names associated with prominent members of the Fifth Monarchy can be seen as a form of self-empowerment, directly linked to the degree of authorial control they wish to be perceived to exert over their work.

Anna Trapnel, who had shot to fame in January 1654 with the report of her twelve-day visionary trance at Whitehall, proudly proclaimed her Fifth Monarchist

connections. She acknowledged her alliance with the congregation of All Hallows, Tower Hill in *The Cry of a Stone*:

I was trained up to my book and writing, I have walked in fellowship with the Church meeting at *All-hallows*, (whereof Mr. *John Simpson* is a Member) for the space of about four years; I am well known to him and that whole Society, also to Mr. *Greenhal* Preacher at *Stepney*, and most of that society, to Mr. *Henry Jesse*, and most of his society (*Cry*, p.3).

And in *Exceeding Riches* Henry Jessey not only listed "Hanna Trapnel" amongst Sarah's visitors, but also recalled that in June 1647 he "heard of one *H.T.* - that then had great enjoyments of God, and could not take in a crumme or sip of the creature, for full *six dayes* together, yet being in bodily health" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.139). It seems that the Whitehall incident was not Trapnel's first mystical experience, but as a result of her trance at Whitehall Trapnel was much more famous than Avery, Cary and Wight were at this point.

Her fame, secured not by her own assertions of authorial control but by male accounts and transcriptions of her words, placed her in a potentially influential position, but it was very much grounded in the idea that the individual is subservient to God. As Kate Chedgzoy has noted, in the language of Trapnel's texts "there is often a strong sense that she feels herself to have been overcome by the Word of God - that a force more powerful than she is working through her and using her."²⁵ The potent power of divinity resounds throughout her writing. In *The Cry of a Stone*, for example, she claimed:

This that thou hast now done upon thy servant, they will not understand that it is an intimation to them of the pouring out of thy Spirit upon thine own, wherein they shall go forth against the world: thy servant was one that was simple, an Idiot, and did not study in such things as these, and must thy servant now float upon the mighty and broad waters ... Oh thy servant knows it is from the Spirit; let them know that it is so too, by the language of it, by the rule through which it comes: how is the written Word carried forth in it! thy Spirit takes the Scripture all along, and sets the soul a-swimming therein (*Cry*, p.67).

Trapnel hardly figures here at all as God is presented as the controlling author.

Undermining her own power as a prophet to the extent that she describes herself as a servant and a simple idiot, we are faced yet again with self-abasement and self-negation. Rather than using the Scripture, argues Chedgzoy, to support her assertions, the prophet is used by it; Trapnel presents herself here as quite passive, scarcely conscious or in control of what she says.²⁶ Elizabeth Avery had also stated that “the power of God” appeared in her work, in relation to which she was merely a weak “instrument whom he doth here employ” (*Scripture-Prophecies*, p.i). And in Rogers' *Ohel* she had declared herself utterly subservient to the power of Christ: “*I found Christ in me, ruling and reigning, and taking all power to himself*” (*Ohel*, p406). Mary Cary's image of her passivity in the composition of *Little Horns Doom* is remarkably similar:

I am a very weak, and unworthy instrument, and have not done this work by any strength of my own, but have been often made sensible, that I could do no more herein (wherein any light, or truth could appear) of myself, than a pencil, or pen can do, when no hand guides it. (*Little Horns Doom*, p.xi)

As Hilary Hinds points out, Cary's image of herself as an instrument reduces the “significance of the author by ascribing authorship to the ultimate male author-of-all: God.”²⁷

As writers the Fifth Monarchy women, Anna Trapnel, Sarah Wight, Elizabeth Avery and Mary Cary seem to be primarily concerned with negating their authorial identity, but is it possible to understand this sort of self expression in a more pro-active way? On the surface it appears that Elizabeth Avery, for example, was perfectly content to have her words mediated by Rogers. Yet, recounting her conversion and subsequent visionary experience as “*God wonderfully appeared*” to her while “at prayer”, Avery does, after all, communicate her experience first of all orally “to the whole Church”, and then in print via Rogers' *Ohel*. For someone whose words were considered so contentious that letters to her husband were “burnt”, perhaps Elizabeth

Avery was using Rogers' text as an opportunity to publicise her own Fifth Monarchist views.²⁸ We know that she did not shy away from writing and publishing her own work since the publication of *Scripture-Prophecies Opened, ... In Several Letters Written to Christian Friends* by herself in 1647. In her message 'To the Reader' at the beginning of *Scripture-Prophecies* Avery affirms that the letters were originally "intended onely for some particular Christians; but seeing that which is contained in them is of general concernment, I do here present it to the view of all". Convinced that her words will benefit any person who reads them, she is not only prepared to publish, but, as she says, "I dare not conceal it in oblivion". She believes she has special knowledge of God, thus it is her duty to proclaim this knowledge publicly.

Likewise, Trapnel forcibly reminds us of a prophet's duty, in a passage from the untitled volume of her writings held in the Bodleian:

That voice which is mine, is very dross, ...
Voice which is mine, bury under ground,
And let no more come:
But what is of the Lord, let it run forth
With a mighty discovering tongue.

Since Trapnel proclaims God's word with a "mighty discovering tongue", even though her own voice is repressed or buried, Chedgzoy argues that these lines illustrate the extent to which prophecy constructs an ambiguous position for women. Weakness becomes a kind of strength, and a public voice with which to make pronouncements on the key social and religious issues of the day is attained, albeit at the cost of reaffirming conventional views of female weakness and irrationality.²⁹ Indeed, the published version of this text seems to anticipate Chedgzoy's point. Its very title *A Lively Voice for the King of Saints* (1658) affirms the active engagement of Trapnel as a "lively voice" even though the voice is speaking 'for' Christ. It also reaffirms the political and religious arguments first made by the Fifth Monarchists in the early 1650s, since as late as 1658, Christ, as the King of the Saints, is still communicating with

them, still promising the advent of the Fifth Monarchy. Trapnel also demonstrated the possibility that mystical dreams and visions could be controlled by those who experienced them rather than by those who simply recorded them:

brother dear, then learn now
To be more nimble in your Pen
To take this matter, and how,
In what manner it doth come down[.]³⁰

Here, her verse implies a startling level of awareness for one in an apparently unconscious state as she issues authorial directions to the person who is acting as scribe. Throughout their writing Trapnel, Avery, Wight and Cary simultaneously negate and affirm the power of their voice, but the level of awareness demonstrated by Trapnel in this extract suggests that this may be a strategy of authorship in which they deliberately represent themselves as vessels of divinity in order to appropriate or share in the ultimate power of the divine.

Some critics have suggested that understanding the writing of Trapnel, for example, in these terms enables us to reconcile negation of oneself with conscious attempts at authorship. Chedgzoy locates “concerns about voice, identity, authority and desire” in the work of Trapnel in order to discuss how she “focuses our central questions of what it means for a woman to give voice.”³¹ During one of her trances Trapnel distinguishes between spiritual and physical voices, exalting the voice of 'God' to the detriment of her own:

The voice it doth come down and cast
All that is of self away;
But what's of Christ it doth show forth;
For it is that must bear sway.
That voice which is mine, pass sentence on;
But what is of the Lord,
Do thou most sweetly utter forth,
And O spread it abroad.
That voice which is mine, is very dross,
It is filthy dregs also:
But what is of the Lord shall be advanced
In its most lovely grace.³²

Looked at in isolation this extract would seem to confirm Trapnel's total self-abnegation, but if we consider it in the light of her work which was actually "written by her own hand" we can understand it as an affirmation of her religious ideals. In *A Legacy for Saints* Trapnel defines herself as speaking text, believing that "Christ [is] in me making use of me to publish the excellency of Jesus Christ" (*Legacy*, p.12). Reaffirming her active engagement in the relationship between the individual and the divine, Trapnel affirmed that she wrote and published her experience, motivated by her belief in God's private words to her. Following an illness God tells her in a vision: "thou shalt not dye but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (*Report*, p.40). In this way her self negation is equal to an appropriation of Godly power. Elaine Hobby suggests that Trapnel's

hold over her audience had come from the fact that her prophecies, calling for the overthrow of residual monarchical structures in the nation, were spoken in a trance. This could be interpreted as a sure sign that the hand of God was upon her.³³

In other words, Trapnel was invested with a degree of authority normally denied women precisely because she was seen to be in communication with God.

Indeed, Sue Wiseman points out that it was possible for women like Trapnel to "manipulate the codes of prophecy and Biblical exegesis to underwrite their status as prophets".³⁴ The experience of Sarah Wight, for example, demonstrates the idea that a woman prophet could claim a duty to publish, since her writing and her words were not her own, but God's. Much of *Exceeding Riches* involves detailed conversations in which Sarah offers spiritual advice to her many visitors, one of whom asks her "Whether [she finds] a tickling pride or hypocrisie, when so many people, and some great ones come to see [her?]" Her quick and effective response is reported thus: "*It's not more to me, then if it were such a one: naming a meaner woman troubled in spirit, that oft*

came to her" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.119). Strengthened by "the sweetness of the Manna" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.33) Wight begins to preach her visionary learning. The account of this begins on

April 20, at night, there being divers neighbours and loving friends come together to see her [...] and divers others, about twelve or mo[r]e, which greatly desired to heare her speake, being much taken and greatly refreshed with what they had heard of her (*Exceeding Riches*, p.35).

Her fame at this point was clearly spreading, "thanksgivings having been made in her behalfe, both in that parish, and in *Ab-Church* their neighbour parish, and els-where" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.35) She begins preaching by speaking first of all to Jessey because he was "in the company, neer to her" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.35). Jessey's subsequent account of it is very emotive as he strives to convey the impact of her preaching:

[Jessey] and the rest, listened, and were greatly affected in hearing her. It cannot affect so much in hearing it at second hand, as if you had heard her selfe, with such brokenness of heart uttering it. (*Exceeding Riches*, p.35)

As a result of her growing fame Jessey tells us that "Many strangers [come] to see her, amongst others that feared God" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.50).

Because she received "*visions of God*" Wight is told by "a good *Lady*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.85): "Now you have the inward teachings of the Spirit" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.86), and is therefore seen to be suitably qualified to "Preach the Gospel to every creature" (*Exceeding Riches*, pp.86, 97), which she does until July 4. She thus becomes a recognised authority on all aspects of religion, which the text promotes by incorporating a question and answer section. Here Sarah answers such questions as: "Why is Faith the Condition of the NEW COVENANT?", "Is there now any use of the Law to us?", "What judge you about GENERALL REDEMPTION, (and the consequences thereof, FREE-WILL, FALLING AWAY, &c. [...])?" (*Exceeding Riches*, pp.91, 92, 95). In so doing, Sarah establishes herself as such an authoritative

figure on specific points of religious law, redemption, and sin and punishment that many "despairing sinners", "sad distressed sinners" and "grievous sinners, as well as "Noble visitors" seek her advice and counsel (*Exceeding Riches*, pp.103, 105, 109, 119).

Since, in the texts which describe visionary experience, the possessed body is essentially female, a relation between masculine discourse and its feminine transfiguration is acted out as 'possessed' women like Sarah Wight and Anna Trapnel attracted hundreds of visitors and nourished the writings of men like John Rogers and Henry Jessey. Yet women's mystical discourse is said to be spoken by another, by one who cannot be physically determined.

As the example of Sarah Wight suggests, the prophetic experience renders the female subject simultaneously inactive in her submission to the perceived forces of divinity, and active in the communication of her visionary learning. This double-edged situation has led critics, such as Hilary Hinds, to claim that the connection with God is the correct interpretative key to re-reading these texts since it provides us with an understanding that 'God's' human instrument is both passive and active.³⁵ Hinds' argument therefore agrees with Elaine Hobby's, who had earlier argued that Cary's analogy of "a pencil, or pen" with no guiding hand, actually functions to force upon the reader a picture of Cary's own hand guiding the pencil since we know it could not have been written otherwise.³⁶ Cary's role as writer of the text is therefore reaffirmed, while she makes the requisite denial of her agency in the matter. Indeed, her identity as author is further enhanced when she explains to the reader that she had signed herself as 'Cary' because this is the name she was using when she last published, in 1648. "I have only one thing more" she writes,

which I judge necessary to acquaint the reader with, and that is this: In my former book which I published in *April*, 1648, I subscribed my name *Cary*, for that was then my name: for which reason I have thought good, to subscribe the same name in the title page of this Book also (*Little Horns Doom*, p.xii).

Likewise, Elizabeth Avery affirmed her role as author, when she stated: "And though I may be counted mad to the world, I shall speak words of sobernesse" (*Scripture-Prophecies*, p.ii). This, along with the signing of her name at the beginning and end of her work, confirms her authorship.

It seems then that in assuming the position of the empty vessel, the Fifth Monarchy women also appropriated godly power. Murray Tolmie points to the political implications of this, in so far as they are evident within the millenarian movement itself. Tolmie argues that one's awareness that one was God's instrument on earth was a given aspect of millenarianism.³⁷ This "millenarian fancy", as Tolmie terms it, gained strength throughout the 1640s, enhancing the Independents' "sense of acting as God's instruments and in the end nerving their arms to strike off the King's head".³⁸ In the attempt to maintain the level of rebellion established during the civil war years which culminated in the execution of Charles I, or in Fifth Monarchist terminology, the doom of the little horn, John Rogers claimed that everyone, including himself, was an instrument of God. Believing that "*The Devils designe is to make the most able and eminent Instruments uselesse by idlenesse, when the greatest worke is to doe*", Rogers wrote that he, "*(and hundreds besides)*", were "suspicious, *least Sathan should deale with them [...] by throwing them some temptations or other, to stay them here behinde, [...] and make them loose in their work*" (*Sagrir*, p.iii). Rogers' incitement also functions as a warning to all of those in the service of 'God', by implying that the idea of the human vessel as an agent of 'God' is extended to encompass the Devil. Manifestly alarmed at the complacency he sees in those around him, it is interesting that Rogers focuses on idleness as an evil for it suggests the level of passivity associated with the whole idea of the individual as vessel. In Rogers' scheme everyone is potentially vulnerable to divine and diabolical forces since as "instruments" individuals are susceptible to the control of "Sathan" as well as 'God'. Of course, in the seventeenth century the belief

in forces of good and evil seeking human instruments was a fundamental one, permeating both popular culture and clerical thought. For instance, Joseph Hall, the Bishop of Norwich, wrote that though “the Devil [...] injects evil motions and draws them forth into act: but yet all ill is not immediately his; we have enough besides of our own: [there are] temptations that are raised out of our own corrupt nature”.³⁹ This also recalls the feelings of complicity in their damnation which marked the self-destructive urges of Sarah Wight and Anna Trapnel. For John Rogers, Joseph Hall, Anna Trapnel and Sarah Wight, the experience of possession is marked in the first instance by physical reactions rather than by speech. Since the experience is supernatural, literally mysterious, it is essentially inexpressible in ordinary discourse. This is something to which I will return in the following chapter, for now I will focus on the extent to which the enactment of possession, seen in the women's nullification of the self, presents a challenge to established authority.

As “instruments” of a higher power, the women visionaries of the Fifth Monarchy movement demonstrated that this self-nullification continued to present a powerful political challenge to authority during the 1650s. Reaffirming her position as “a willing Servant of Jesus Christ and his Saints”⁴⁰, Mary Cary was determined that everyone should understand that the proper conditions for the rule of saints were being fulfilled. She therefore successfully petitioned two members of Parliament, Francis Rous and Thomas Boon, to read out her interpretation of events occurring in the Revelation of John the Divine: “Now”, she wrote,

as it most clearly appears to me from the divine oracles of Scripture, [...] I have in the ensuing discourse held it forth [...] that the time is already come, wherein the appointed time of the prevailing power of the beast over the saints, is come to a period; and accordingly Jesus Christ hath begun to bring down the power of the beast. (*Resurrection*, pp.97-102)

Throughout her text she transposes the meaning of events in Revelation into an understanding of recent political events in England. For example, in Revelation 11:11 God tells St. John that “after three days and a half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, [his two witnesses, or prophets] and they stood upon their feet ;and great fear fell upon them which saw them.” Cary’s application of this part of the Apocalypse is highly political. For her, the three and a half days correspond to the three and a half years from “the 23rd day of *October* 1641 [when] the beast [began] the war in *Ireland*”, and in England, until the “5. day of *Aprill* 1645”: “The three propheticall dayes and a half, that is, the three yers and a half, [...] were compleately ended that fifth day of *April*, and from that time as they were put into a new form, so they had a new spirit”. Cary continues that from this time such

a spirit of life entered into them, which did appear in all their actings afterward: for they went on with such vigor, courage, life, and fortitude, as they effected all the work they undertook, had the victory in every battel they fought, took in all the Cities and Towns, and Castles, they sate down before, clearing County after County, and their enemies ever flying before them (*Resurrection* pp.56,57).

For Cary prophecy seems to depend on a political reading of biblical ‘signs’ which, for the Fifth Monarchists, demonstrated God’s affiliation with their cause. As such the pursuit of their political aims was manifestly interwoven with prophecy as the public interpretation of Scripture. Negation of identity for Cary seems overall to have enabled her to convey her political views as her work was written, published and read out in Parliament.

The Absence of Being

As a Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary was the means by which the political relevance of the ‘word of God’ was communicated to Parliament. But the understanding of Cary as the archetypal empty vessel empowered by her alliance with a divine spirit, is complicated by the fact that this is not an exclusively female phenomenon. As we

know, implicit in Fifth Monarchy ideology is the fact that all its members are instruments of divine (or diabolical) control. Certainly Rogers' self perception was also that of a vessel whose object was, as he defined it, to 'speake for *Christ*', though he was also aware that in pursuing this aim he was exposing himself to the power of "Sathan" (*Sagrir*, p.xi). Indeed, in all of the ongoing debates on the subject of woman as empty vessel the one other factor that has never been taken into consideration is that there were prominent male prophets who also negated authorial identity. Arise Evans and John Rogers both referred to themselves as a "faithful Servant in Christ Jesus" and a "humble Servant in the service of our Lord Jesus".⁴¹ The Quaker John Perrot wrote: "I am a Worm poor and low, which in the Earth doth creep".⁴² The Ranter John Pordage affirmed that he uttered "the Words of a Servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ" and, he continued "I speak *sound Words*, yea the veri Words of the great God".⁴³ Fellow Ranter, Abiezer Coppe, writing in a letter to a female visionary, "why doest in thy letter say, (what though we be weaker vessels, women? Etc.). I know that male and female are all one in Christ, and they are all one to me", implies that the empty vessel idea is a purely religious phenomenon, applicable to all prophets, male and female.⁴⁴ Indeed we can trace this idea back to the Bible. St. Paul, for example, not only told the Corinthians: "I am nothing", but in his second epistle, he also claimed: "I write these things being absent" (1 Cor. 13:2, 2 Cor. 13:10). In the Bible, the 'vision of God' is described as the supreme goal of the Christian life. It derives from one of the beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Significantly, it is attainable only by detaching oneself from the self-centred desires of the senses, thereby enabling one's spiritual essence to commune with 'God'. Together these examples of male self-negation show the extent to which 'God' was placed in possession of language and meaning. With a 'God' who is in possession of language subjectivity is therefore problematic for *all* speaking subjects.

Why then is self-negation a more critical issue in women's writing? Sue Wiseman writes of female prophets that "if they point 'out' of the text towards a self it is to a self that is instrumental, both gendered and not gendered, [a] self having agency only in the grace of God".⁴⁵ But Rogers' experience suggests that the same argument can be applied to male prophetic writing: "I am not I", he wrote, "but by the grace of God" (*Ohe!*, p.438). Here Rogers wholly negates any sense of his self agency. On one hand, this seems to eradicate distinctions of gender which could suggest that these distinctions are being deliberately disrupted, on the other hand, the idea of a self which is both gendered and not gendered would seem to refute the concept of a mysticism which is gender specific. Yet it is possible to place a third construction on this which would mean that the issues arising from Wiseman's comment actually function to underline the differences of power and control which are traditionally the province of the masculine. Men like John Rogers and Arise Evans can negate gender identity in their writing and it goes unnoticed. Women like Anna Trapnel and Mary Cary do the same and it is immediately a gender issue which comments on their subordinate position in society.

It is possible to see that the image of the 'possessed' woman therefore leads us towards an understanding of the discourse of an 'absent' being, as well as offering us an opportunity to examine the reshaping of language through the idea that the mystic's female body is possessed by supernatural forces. As we have seen, Sarah Wight, Elizabeth Avery, Mary Cary and Anna Trapnel speak and write from the position of the 'empty nothing creature', yet they also edit their texts and construct images of themselves as speaking women. Using a language which they adapt to communicate their views, women's mystical discourse, involving silence, tears and fasting, produces what can be called an alteration of language.

Sarah Wight was the first woman associated with the Fifth Monarchy movement to demonstrate the concept of the empty nothing creature, and her potent experience, along with those of other women like Mary Cary and Anna Trapnel, suggest the possibility that John Rogers was keen to emulate these enigmatic though powerful examples of negation. This in turn suggests Irigaray's ideas surrounding the relationship between meaning and being in 'La Mystérique'. As Irigaray writes, the "problem is to break down the walls around the (male) one who speaks, sees, thinks, and thereby now confers being upon himself".⁴⁶ Male writers, being of the sex which controls meaning are in possession of being, whereas women are not. This situation is reflected in the process of authorship since an author is a person who brings the work into being. In their exclusion from the power of authorial control, women consequently seem to be disadvantaged and may indeed desire to disrupt or negate distinctions of gender. However, for Irigaray 'meaning' is a negative force, "a prison of self-sufficiency and a clarity made of the shadows of denial" ('La Mystérique', p.192), and as such is an impediment in any effort to attain the freedom and empowerment associated with self-knowledge. As I argued in chapter four, the mystical journey becomes the "speculum" instrument, the means by which women gain an insight into their inner self, and it is significant that this journey is associated particularly with the feminine.

Luce Irigaray observes that women are "the richest in revelations" ('La Mystérique', p.192), and feminist critics have tended to suggest that prophecy as divine utterance is a particularly feminine sphere. Patricia Crawford argues that "[f]emale prophecy was far more common than male"; Phyllis Mack points out that due to "the pervasiveness of feminine spiritual imagery" women were more suited to prophecy; and Hilary Hinds maintains that prophecy was a form of writing readily available to women, which in "relation to the figure of the author as prophet [...]" femininity could, unusually for the seventeenth century, function to legitimate and

authorise women's public and spiritual activities".⁴⁷ Chedgzoy also argues that there was "a special association between women and prophecy".⁴⁸ Not only does women's self-negation demonstrate that 'God', the ultimate patriarch, allies 'Himself' with the feminine, in Irigaray's words, it also demonstrates that

He has chosen *her* body to inscribe His will, even if she is less able to read the inscription, poorer in language, 'crazier' in her speech, burdened with matter(s) that history has laid on her, shackled in/by speculative plans that paralyse her desire. ('La Mystérique', p.198)

Despite, or perhaps because of, women's perceived lack of rationality and understanding as well as the way in which women have been defined and constructed through and by history, 'God' selects them for this "tremendous good fortune" which is both "elevation and revelation" ('La Mystérique', p.198) of the feminine self.

With the ordinary faculties of consciousness suspended, women are free to explore their nature in a journey of internalisation which aids them in the discovery of a feminine core of being so that they can assimilate this into their personality. The core or, as Irigaray writes, the "center", is hidden from ordinary consciousness because it is composed of "matter so fluid" that it exists "beyond the senses, moving in ways alien to any fixed reflection." But, by emptying out the rationalised knowledge of the self in order to achieve an "absence of being", the woman mystic is able to "become" the "image" of herself "in this nothingness that [she is]" at the moment of negation. That is, the women mystic becomes "A living mirror" to herself, the purpose of which is "to bring [her] 'nature' back to its mirroring wholeness" ('La Mystérique', pp.196-7). Women's self-negation is therefore a crucial aspect of female authorship.

When it comes to writing of 'God' and the political relevance of the bible to contemporary understanding, the Fifth Monarchy women had an advantage over the men since they could access the mystical sphere more readily, discovering a new sense of self as they did so. According to Irigaray men can only access this sphere

through and because of women. For it is, writes Irigaray “for/by woman that man dares to enter the place, to descend into it, condescend to it, even if he gets burned in the attempt.” (‘La Mystérique’, p.191) The “place” to which she refers is ‘La Mystérique’, the mystical space which evades the constrictions of masculine “logic”. For “man” to enter he must have “given up his knowledge in order to attend to woman’s madnesses” (‘La Mystérique’, p.192). Knowledge for Irigaray is not simply the sum of one’s learning, it is the assumption or consciousness that “the (male) one” is in control of a systematic whole in which the principles of logic and reason dominate. Applying this theory to Rogers’ claims that he has given up some part of his self to divine agency facilitates an awareness of his desire to participate in this feminine domain.

The realisation that male prophets also negated authorial agency enables us to conceive of a pattern in religious writing in which, as Mary Cary points out, however base one’s estate “great preachers and publishers of Gospell-truths; [are] gifted and inabled to hold forth publickly to edification, exhortation and comfort Gospell truths” (*New Jerusalem’s Glory*, p.106). In fact, for Fifth Monarchists this was precisely the point. For they believed in the nobility of one’s soul rather than of birth. They justified these beliefs by constantly citing passages from Psalms (146:9), Isaiah (24:1-2), and Acts (17: 1-6) all referring to the ‘world turned upside down’.⁴⁹ When Cary wrote that those that “doe covet to treasure up most riches for themselves, [...] kings, Princes, and evill Governours,” shall become the “basest and vilest”, she warned that not only would those in positions of power be overthrown, they would be replaced by those who were currently powerless, the saints who seek “safety and happinesse, and salvation” (*New Jerusalem’s Glory*, pp.56-7).

Of course, for women who were legally powerless, and traditionally marginalised, it seems clear that this millenarian group offered them a means of self-empowerment to the extent that as ‘saints’ they became theoretically equal to male

members of the organisation. It is also clear that although their male counterparts negated self-identity, female prophecy was much more potent. We already know that in the potency of their mystical trances women like Sarah Wight or Anna Trapnel drew large audiences. With their female bodies on display they generated female power and authority.

Therefore, when Rogers wrote that “*empty vessells* make the *greatest* noise”, he described a process whereby the prophet as God's vessel could unite religious and political beliefs to great effect. This is especially significant for women who used their prophetic discourse in an attempt to instigate the changes outlined above, and in so doing prevailed against the difficulties they encountered both inside and outside the movement. They looked forward to a time when, in Trapnel's words, the “Saints” will enjoy a

quietnesse and peace that passeth all understanding [...] and round about them, no dealing of men shall make them afraid, their Tabernacle, no politician shall take down, if any[one] shall stretch out their tongue or hand against the Lords Prophets and servants, they shall wither and shrink up with leprosie'.⁵⁰

The women themselves did not present a feminist agenda, they simply followed their religious/political beliefs. Sarah Wight stated her mystical aim in *Exceeding Riches* with repeated use of the phrase: “*a full Christ, to a nothing Creature: a full Christ, to a nothing Creature*” (*Exceeding Riches*, p.31). She clarifies this in her *Letter* when she writes that “the true-divine soul, you know, is never satisfied, till it's as neer God as is attainable” (*Letter*, p.5). The point is to empty or negate one's self in order to attain spiritual perfection:

A Christian's happiness lies in being emptied of all self; self refined, as well as gross self; and in being filled with a full God, and the glorious emptying, satisfying incomes of his free spirit (*Letter*, p.5).

Wight's concept of the self is rooted in the inescapable idea of physical corruption, but the “self refined” is included along with the “gross self”, thus equating the pure and the

impure. Significantly, Wight's message is not gendered. All individuals, she feels, ought to glory as she does in the emptying or purging of physical corruption so that "we" can "exalt our condition in him" (*Letter*, p.6). Wight's "sinful, vaine, contemptible" and "refined" body becomes a metaphor for the Saints as it is pardoned and purified by God's grace: "How sweet are the Teachings of the Spirit to my soule! Sweeter then the Teachings of men" (*Exceeding Riches*, pp.21, 28). Her experience of metaphorical death and rebirth, as she receives free grace, "*a full Christ, to a nothing Creature*", reaffirms Fifth Monarchist beliefs (*Exceeding Riches*, p.31). In her self-negation Sarah Wight, like Mary Cary, Elizabeth Avery and Anna Trapnel, was an extremely commanding and influential figure.

In analysing the issue of the empty nothing creature in the writing of the Fifth Monarchy women, the mystical perspective allows us to identify both the body's physicality and its spiritual possibilities. The mergence of the self with the divine spirit is also a mergence of the physical with the spiritual, itself a dominant feature of the mystical writings of Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and St. Bridget, which testifies once again to the fact that in women's mysticism the body is a potent signifier of this transcendental experience. As such it enables us to measure the extent of women's self-empowerment even as their writing denies self-agency. Irigaray wrote that 'La Mystérique' is "the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly." By finding the self which, as Irigaray notes, "imposes a *proximity* that knows no aspect, mode, or figure", the Fifth Monarchy women were able to construct a space, material and spiritual, in which they could exchange their culture's constraints for an independence of spirit which was to prove invaluable to them in their attempts to instigate social and political changes.

NOTES

- 1 Henry Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced*, (1647) Wing J687, p.iii. Hereafter cited in the text as *Exceeding Riches*.
- 2 Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (1654) Wing T2031, TT 112:E730(3), pp.10, 74. Hereafter cited in the text as *Cry*.
- 3 John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh* (1653) Wing R1813, p.464. Hereafter cited in the text as *Ohel*.
- 4 Sue Wiseman, 'Unsilent instruments and the Devil's Cushions: Authority in Seventeenth-Century Women's Prophetic Discourse' in Isobel Armstrong (ed.), *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.176.
- 5 See Mary Cary, *The Little Horns Doom and Downfall and New Jerusalems Glory* (1651) Wing C736, p.xi. Hereafter cited in the text respectively as *Little Horns Doom* and *New Jerusalems Glory*.
- 6 Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful Pleasant and Profitable Letter* (1656) Wing W2106, TT E1681 (1), p.iii. Hereafter cited in the text as *Letter*.
- 7 Keith Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects' in *Past and Present* 13 (1958), pp.42-62, p.56.
- 8 John Pordage, *Theologia Mystica* (1683) Wing P2968, pp.1, 108.
- 9 Wendy Wall, 'Our Bodies / Our Texts?: Renaissance Women and the Trials of Authorship' in Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (eds.), *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp.51-71, p.51.
- 10 See Margaret Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), particularly chapter three; Steven W. May, 'Tudor Aristocrats and the Mythical 'Stigma of Print' ' in *Renaissance Papers* 10 (1980), pp.11-18; J.W. Saunders, 'The Stigma of Print: A Note of the Social Bases of Tudor Poetry' in *Essays in Criticism* 1 (1951), pp.139-64.
- 11 Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', p.56.
- 12 This reference is to Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613) in S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (eds.), *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) Act three, lines 183-5.
- 13 See, for example, *The Compleat Woman* (1639) STC 7266, also Anthony Stafford *The Femall Glory* (1635) STC 23123.
- 14 Mary Eagleton (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell,

1986) p.40.

- 15 From 'The Discourse', An Collins, *Divine Songs and Meditations* (1653) Wing C5355.
- 16 *Eliza's Babes* (1652) Wing E526, pp.ii, i.
- 17 Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.133.
- 18 Anna Trapnel, *A Legacy for Saints* (1654) Wing T2032, TT 123:E806(1), p.18. Hereafter cited in the text as *Legacy*.
- 19 Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640 1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.269.
- 20 Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, LA & Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p.74.
- 21 From Gerrard Winstanley, 'Letter to Eleanor Davies, Pirton, Hertfordshire, 1650', Paul Hardacre (ed.), *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 22 (1959), pp.345-49. For account of Winstanley's attitude to women see Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp.67-74.
- 22 Francis Rous, *The Misticall Marriage* (1653) TT E1525, p.iii. Hereafter cited in the text as *Misticall Marriage*.
- 23 George Fox, *The Women Learning in Silence: or, the Myserie of the Womans Subjection to Her Husband* (1655) TT E870 (8), p.2. Hereafter cited in the text as *Women*.
- 24 See *Exceeding Riches*, 'For my dear and honoured Friend and cosen, M^r H. Jacie', pp.xvii-xviii.
- 25 Kate Chedgzoy, 'Female Prophecy in the Seventeenth Century: the Instance of Anna Trapnel' in William Zunder and Suzanne Trill (eds.), *Writing and the English Renaissance* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), pp.238-54, p.243.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.89.
- 28 For an account of this, see *Ohel*, p.405.
- 29 Chedgzoy, 'Female Prophecy', pp.250, 251.
- 30 This quotation is taken from Champlin Burrage, 'Anna Trapnel's Prophecies' in *English Historical Review* 26 (1911), pp.526-535, p.528.

- 31 Kate Chedgzoy, 'Introduction: "Voice that is Mine" ' in Kate Chedgzoy, Melanie Hansen and Suzanne Trill (eds.), *Voicing Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern Writing* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996), pp.1-10, pp.4-5.
- 32 This extract is from Trapnel's untitled volume in Bodleian (shelfmark S.1.42 Th).
- 33 Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity* (London: Virago, 1988), p.29.
- 34 Wiseman, 'Unsilent instruments', p.186.
- 35 See Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, p.99.
- 36 See Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, p.30.
- 37 See Murray Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints. The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.86.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Here Joseph Hall emphasises the Devil's injection of evil motions into the individual, recalling both Trapnel and Wight's feelings of complicity in their own damnation. Both Rogers and Hall assume the nullification of the self, explaining humanity's evil, and idleness, on the power of the devil. Joseph Hall, *Select Thoughts* (1654) Wing H413, pp.105-06.
- 40 Mary Cary, *The Resurrection of the Witnesses* (1648) Wing C737, title page. Hereafter cited in the text as *Resurrection*.
- 41 See *The great and bloody Visions interpreted by Arise Evans* (1653) TT E224(2), p.6, and *Sagrir*, p.iv.
- 42 John Perrot, *A Sea of the Seed's Sufferings* (1661) quoted in Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p.71.
- 43 Pordage, *Theologia Mystica*, pp.11,16.
- 44 Abiezer Coppe, 'Epistle V' quoted in Mack, *Visionary Women*, p.67.
- 45 Wiseman, 'Unsilent instruments', p.186.
- 46 Luce Irigaray, 'La Mystérique' in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, rpt. 1994), pp.191-202, p.192. Hereafter cited in the text as 'La Mystérique'.
- 47 Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, pp.9-19.
- 48 Chedgzoy, 'Female Prophecy', pp.239, 249.
- 49 Most notably, Christopher Hill has emphasised the threatening nature of this image in his book of the same name, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical*

Ideas During the English Revolution (London: Temple Smith, 1972).

50 Anna Trapnel, *Report and Plea* (1654) Wing T2033, p.56.

CHAPTER SIX

WRITING DEFIANCE: LAW, LANGUAGE AND THE FIFTH MONARCHY WOMEN

In *Scripture Prophecies* Elizabeth Avery wrote that a "spirit of Errour doth reside in the flesh more than ever, even in the Saints themselves".¹ The inescapable view that the human being is predisposed to sin is the reason behind humanity's need to impose upon itself a moral rule of behaviour, epitomised in the Jewish and Christian world by the Ten Commandments. In chapter four I drew attention to the references John Rogers made to certain sins, such as "sabbath-breaking". Although he affirmed that his sins were not as extensive as some, he remained concerned about his eternal fate.² The writing of the Fifth Monarchy women expresses similar concerns. Indeed, in chapter four I also discussed Anna Trapnel's emotive accounts of both her perceived fall from grace and her subsequent understanding that she is blessed.³ However, the Fifth Monarchy women's engagement with the issue of religious law needs further consideration in order to analyse the relationship between Mosaic Law, civil law and the "phallocratic order" which, in Luce Irigaray's scheme, produces the philosophical discourse that is the core of the symbolic order and which lays down the law for all.⁴ For Irigaray the law is a phallocratic system of order and control, dominated by a "theological onto-logical perspective" within which "woman" is "framed".⁵ Women are "framed" within the symbolic order because, according to Irigaray, it provides the "matter" from which the "speaking subject draws nourishment in order to produce itself, to reproduce itself" (*This Sex*, p.75). By examining the Fifth Monarchy women's experiences of legal and moral restraint, and their reactions to them, the aim of this chapter is bound up with Irigaray's theory that women must disrupt and challenge the philosophical discourse which defines and

controls them.

Mosaic Law

Anna Trapnel's *A Legacy for Saints* begins with the claim that the text is an account of "some experiences of the workings of God in legall convictions".⁶ What does she mean by "legall convictions"? Is she referring to Mosaic law? If so, do her mystical experiences reaffirm Mosaic law as the proper form of religious rule for living, or do they challenge this? *A Legacy for Saints* is a narrative account of her relationship with 'God' before and after conversion, and she commences her narrative by recounting the extent of her spirituality during childhood. Despite feeling "smitten" with guilt for "the least trespass", she recalls that as a child she felt certain of God's love and protection, no matter what she did. And in a reference to the perceived intrinsic corruption of fallen humanity, she declares: "though my nature was as corrupt as any [...] yet still the all-seeing eye watched my ways" (*Legacy*, p.1). Believing in the mercy of the "all-seeing eye", as a child, Trapnel adhered to the biblical precedent wherein every little trespass threatened to impede one's path to salvation, and which was dominated by a consciousness of one's guilt and ultimately, faith in divine justice and the mercy of 'God'.

In an indication of her early tendency to preach, Trapnel tells us that when she was "about 14 years of age" she "appeared a very high grown Christian in the thoughts of many". She says she "had great parts, in prayer great enlargements, and in discoursing and repeating of sermons"; and in affirming that she was "in all this very legall" she suggests her obedience to the "Covenant" (*Legacy*, pp.1-3). In the Old Testament the covenant stresses grace on the part of 'God' and demands the people's compliance with the law in all its ramifications. However, after hearing a sermon by a "Mr. Peters" Trapnel feels excluded from the covenant. The popular psychologist

Robert Burton commented on the excessive and threatening sort of preaching common to Puritan ministers, denouncing those "thundering Ministers" who spoke all justice and no mercy, and drove their hearers into religious melancholy.⁷ Trapnel testifies to the fact that her preacher followed this tradition exactly, since believing herself to be excluded from God's mercy, she becomes filled with fear of God, and "was strongly tempted to destroy [her]self" (*Legacy*, p.2). Her "Spirit" is "filled with horror", and she recalls that "the terrors of the Law exceedingly oppressed [her]". In her desperation she seeks comfort from further sermons, explaining that she "ran from Minister to Minister, from Sermon to Sermon, but I could find no rest", and comments that she "was exceedingly hurried to duty, & to Ordinances" (*Legacy*, pp.2-3).

Her reference to "Ordinances" is significant in that in the New Testament 'ordinance' means Mosaic law, which is "the law of the commandments contained in ordinances", the commandments of 'God', and requirements of law in general (Eph. 2:15, Rom. 13:2, 1 Pet. 2:13).⁸ Together these biblical examples demonstrate the eternal importance of conforming to "the ordinance of God", for "they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation". As an adolescent, Trapnel is made to feel that she is resisting the "ordinances of God" simply because she fails to participate in Mr. Peters' sermon. She records the content of his sermon which aimed to show "the sweet compellation of God, to his Covenanted people", "and though", Trapnel continues, "I thought my self in a very good condition before, yet now it seized upon my spirit, that surely I was not in the Covenant". It is significant that she refers to the marriage covenant between "God and his Spouse", which, according to the bible is open only to those who are truly good, for it suggests a general sense of exclusion. In order to understand the full import of the misery associated with Trapnel's isolated position at this point it is necessary to consider the movement of ideas surrounding damnation and salvation, justice and mercy.

The misery of the human condition, as it pertains to the loss of hope of salvation and the sense of exclusion from 'God's' mercy, has provided subject matter for many Renaissance writers whose work corroborated the prevalent idea that Mosaic law placed us "under the power of the divel [and] in the lawe we find death, damnation and wrath, moreover the curse and vengeance of God upon us".⁹ Milton famously engages with Mosaic Law and the misery generated by it in *Paradise Lost* by conveying the idea that Adam is given to understand that once he is "manifold in sin" he will multiply curses and evil by multiplying progeny: "for what can I increase / Or multiply but curses on my head?"¹⁰ Mosaic law is therefore identified with death and curses. Indeed, as Jason Rosenblatt observes, in one of *De doctrina Christiana*'s most thoroughly Pauline chapters (1.26), Milton cites Romans 7:7-13 as proof that Mosaic law is an instrument through which humankind recognises its own depravity.¹¹ At the same time as revealing humanity's depravity to itself, Mosaic law also shows its superiority in having a rule of law to confirm humankind's position of mastery in the natural order. The problem is that Mosaic law by itself is too stringent. Since he has transgressed the codes of law, Milton's Adam offers his dead body to God as punishment for his crime:

it were but right
And equal to reduce me to my dust,
Desirous to resign, and render back
All I receiv'd, unable to perform
Thy terms too hard (10.747-51).

At this point in *Paradise Lost* the law is "too hard" to "perform" because God has not initiated the system of grace. *Paradise Lost* teaches us that humankind cannot obey Mosaic law because, as Rosenblatt points out, our physical bodies contain another (natural) law, which forces us into an endless state of conflict as our physical urges prevent us from doing the good that is required by Mosaic law.¹² Indeed, as

Susan Snyder observes, Luther theorised that there are two kinds of theological knowledge: that of the law, which teaches humanity its own guilt, and that of the Gospel, which teaches God's mercy as the justifier of humankind. Crucially, the Gospel can only be reached *through* the law. Humanity is totally corrupt, therefore in order to realise its depravity it must undergo the rigors of the law and recognise itself as damned. An absolute dependence on God's power arises out of despair. So, for Luther salvation was attainable through despair which brought knowledge of grace.¹³

Conforming to the New Testament idea that grace is bound up in the figure of Christ, the Son of God offers to save Adam in *Paradise Lost*.¹⁴ However, although grace, and therefore salvation, becomes possible through the death of Christ, it "devalues human nature and denies the goodness of the created order" since humanity is participating in a system of exchange wherein Christ's body is substituted for salvation.¹⁵ Paul's references to grace in the New Testament also assume the generally debased state of humanity. Having proclaimed, for example, that it was by the grace of God that believers like himself were "called", those who received grace, which ensured salvation, were to "glory in the Lord" and not boast (1Cor. 1:31, Rom. 3:27). Throughout the books of Romans and Corinthians, Paul suggested the existence of a rule of grace whereby those who lived under it lived in the obedience of faith, the "fruit" of obedience being "holiness" and "eternal life" (Rom. 6:22-23). Like Mosaic law, grace also becomes a rule of behaviour intended to keep an imperfect humanity on a 'godly' path.¹⁶

Originating with Paul, both Luther and Milton are participating in a continuous debate about the virtues of the concepts of damnation and salvation, justice and mercy. For example, in the fourth century Augustine believed that the law, as a system of ethical precepts, was good in itself, but without grace it could produce only fear and

dejection.¹⁷ In effect it shows people their sin without giving them the means to avoid it since the individual could do good only through grace. This was Paul's meaning when he said that "the law *is* the knowledge of sin", " and "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 3:20 5.20). The law without grace makes sin "abound", and furthermore, that "the letter" of the law "killeth but the spirit giveth life (2 Cor. 3:6). As Susan Snyder points out, Augustine stated that the law gives us fear, which is a check on presumption; then grace gives us hope, lest we despair. But the transition may be perilous. Fear is the gift of 'God', but if not followed by hope it is death-dealing, like the law without grace and the letter without the spirit.¹⁸ Implicit in the whole Pauline-Augustinian tradition of the law and grace is the premise that humanity in its fallen state is unable to fulfil the law. Justice dictates that those who do not fulfil it cannot be saved, but since humanity is considered unable to conform to religious law, it follows that no one can be saved.¹⁹

With the promise of eternal damnation an ever present threat, the system of religious law is, as we have seen, rigid and prescriptive. Anna Trapnel claimed that she had observed the law, but she was still certain that she was not assured of grace. Following the teachings of such theologians as Augustine and Luther we can see that she is, as she states, "oppressed" by the "terrors of the law" since they suggest to her a fundamental corruption, and are evidence of the "divine displeasure" directed against her which alienates her from 'God' (*Legacy*, p.2). In the attempt to overcome her sense of damnation she desires *more* law in the form of sermons and the study of scripture.

Negotiating the Phallocratic Order

Implicit in the concern for discipline along the lines of Mosaic law is a demand for control. 'Godly' discipline translates into the insistence for social discipline to the extent

that it is used as a means of controlling the self. By demanding self-discipline to ensure salvation, the individual unwittingly conforms to required codes of conduct. The indoctrination of humanity into such a system of control exemplifies Irigaray's notion of the "matter" from which the "speaking subject produces and represents" itself.²⁰ If one's whole sense of being revolves around notions of one's worthiness according to the dictatorial, authoritarian rule of theological thought, as Trapnel's clearly seems to do, then one's understanding of oneself will inevitably be diminished. It certainly appears to be the case that Trapnel's experience of religious discourse provided the "matter" from which she produced herself as intrinsically corrupt, and represented herself in negative terms as one "undone" (*Legacy*, p.2).

Trapnel's self-representation as one "undone" suggests most obviously that she is lost and ruined, but it also carries with it the idea that she sees herself in wholly negative terms as somehow incomplete, literally deconstructed. This is compounded by her physical reaction to her psychological conviction that she is alienated from 'God'. For while feeling "oppressed" by the "terrors of the law", all senses necessary for perception fail her, and she recalls that she "was stricken dumb, or else fast asleep" (*Legacy*, p.3). The "spirit of God" which had been as a "prop" to her, has now been taken from her, and she writes that she was rendered "a cripple, [...] left in the dark concerning the righteousness of the Lord Jesus" (*Legacy*, p.3). However, as I argued in chapter four, this condition is not necessarily negative. Silence and darkness form the essence of Irigaray's 'La Mystérique', and in her scheme the female subject enters this realm of seeming chaos to escape the "masculine" assumptions which have constructed her as "woman".²¹ With the ordinary faculties of perception suspended, women are free to explore their inner nature in a journey of internalisation which functions to aid in the discovery of a feminine core of being, and to assimilate this into their personality so that they are not simply, in Irigaray's words, "framed" as indelibly

inferior to the "rational" male ('La Mystérique', p.193).

During this process of internalisation 'God' communicates to women mystics like Trapnel, and ordinary modes of discourse shift from external to internal and become secret. This process also has a history which is pertinent to Trapnel's perceived alienation from 'God'. Hildegard was one of the first women mystics to write that the divine spirit "touched" the "humble dwelling" that was herself so that it might "see a miracle and form unknown letters and utter an unknown tongue".²² In this case the woman mystic is not only assured of her attachment to 'God', she is also empowered to communicate 'His' message in the public sphere. Similarly, in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, Christ appears to her and speaks to her "without voyce", and, she tells us, "opening [his] Lips formed in my Soul these Words". The words he forms in her soul crucially confirm that Christ's sacrifice atones for the "sin" of our physical state since "the Passion of him is the overcoming of the *fiend*".²³ Julian understands that Satan, or "the fiend" is active in the world, but because the fiend cannot defeat Christ he must direct his assault against a fallible humanity, which by its sinful nature is prone to lose sight of God and thereby becomes vulnerable. Julian teaches therefore, that mystics should identify with the Passion of Christ, especially since Christ has confronted Satan's assault on the flesh by virtue of the crucifixion, so as to resist evil.

Though the Fifth Monarchists also begin with the precept that humanity is corrupt, the fear and guilt which are associated with this idea are offset by the influence of a female tradition which maintains the fundamental goodness of humanity. The female tradition is resistant to the notions of a depraved and sinful humanity as expressed by a long line of eminent male theologians, though Elizabeth Avery modifies this slightly since she distinguishes between the "saints" and those who are "the enemies of God" (*Scripture Prophecies*, p.7). The "enemies of God" are those who will be "damned [...] for the sin of unbelief, as the Scripture declares in divers places"

(*Scripture-Prophecies*, pp.7, 23). She continues to explain that "the satisfaction which was in Christ", in other words his suffering and Passion, functioned as "a sufficient ransom" to redeem humanity, "for", she writes that, "in that the whole Creation was redeemed from the curse of the Law" (*Scripture-Prophecies*, p.23). Avery implies that with the exception of the "unbelievers", "the whole of Creation" is freed from the threat of damnation. Of course, for Avery, the "enemies of God", the "unbelievers", are also all those who oppose the Saints. Moreover, those "who have procured the greatest evil unto themselves in persecuting of the Saints" are also those who have contributed to the "fallen" condition of the "State and [the] National Church of *Great Britain*" (*Scripture-Prophecies*, p.6). She goes on to argue that just as Christ's sacrifice was once necessary to redeem fallen humanity, so this time a "vail of darkness" will continue "till God is manifested in the flesh of the saints, as he was in the Humanity of Christ", so that the "Antichrist" or the "spirit of Errour" is purged from the flesh of the "unbelievers". Her words clearly imply the deification of the "Saints" or Fifth Monarchists, which will ensure redemption and salvation for all those who desire the "restoration of the Truth" (*Scripture Prophecies*, p.2).

Anna Trapnel's writing expands upon Avery's idea of "the curse of the Law", but for her human fallibility proves 'God's' mercy. By means of an internalised and interactive relationship with "the great and glorious God", in which she states, "I was put upon arguing with God", Trapnel is given to understand that "by an act of grace through the blood of the Lord Jesus" she is assured of salvation (*Legacy*, pp.5, 8). Salvation is achieved only through the suffering of Christ and Trapnel is greatly comforted by this experience of mystical learning. 'God' assures her that Christ willingly purges her of "sin", as the blood of Christ washes her clean of all physical impurity. Her mystical experience inspires her to encourage others with the affirmation: "let not any poor soul

despair, there is free grace enough, an ocean, to swallow up, not my sins onely, but many more, [...] you cannot out-sin mercy" (*Legacy*, p.7). Trapnel's direct mystical experiences therefore teach her the value of humanity and enable her to emphasise the fact, as she sees it, that Christ's sacrifice was freely given.

Anna Trapnel's journey through metaphorical darkness not only enables her to comprehend her salvation, it also culminates in a vision which presents "Death [...] without a sting, and the Law without strength" (*Legacy*, p.14). She declares that she was "past from Mount *Sinai*, into the Regions of Mount *Sion*, where I saw an end of the Law for Righteousness sake to every one that believes", although she assures her reader that this does not mean that she "was now without Law unto God" (*Legacy*, p.14). It seems that this vision gives her the insight necessary to understand that her initial suffering arose from the misapplication of the law, for "in respect of our corruptness, in the using of it, we it were that were faulty, not the Law", which "in itself [...] was pure" (*Legacy*, p.14). For Trapnel, the fault lies chiefly in the "commands" which she "could not attain to". Trapnel actually seems to merge Mosaic and civil law since she refers to the "Law" as it is written in the Bible, the "Gospel commands", as well as to the "legall precepts" which govern the society in which she lives (*Legacy*, pp.14-15). Although she advocates "a harmony between both" (*Legacy*, p.14), she affirms that her mystical experience has taught her to overcome the terror which arose from the conviction that she was excluded from grace. She consequently makes the claim that there is "a Law within me" (*Legacy*, p.14). This claim reaffirms the notion that she believes herself to be divinely empowered through her relationship with 'God'. As a conduit for God's word she suggests the existence of a law wherein "frowns are gone, and smiles are come, thunder is fallen, and the still voice is risen, death under, life in the top" (*Legacy*, pp.14-15). Direct access to 'God's' word through visionary experience has enabled her to perceive of a system of law based on "morall precepts". These

necessarily emphasise gladness and blessedness, counteracting the intimidating force of "legall precepts".

Indeed Trapnel's views here are in keeping with her position as a Fifth Monarchist, for she suggests a new political order in which Saints are accountable to no authority but God's. "Saints", she writes, "are not under legall precepts, but under Gospel commands, and in this sense they are dead to the Law by the life of Christ in them" (*Legacy*, p.15). Thus, as a Fifth Monarchist, Trapnel's claim presents a challenge to the established idea of law, disclaiming the obligatoriness of "moral" and "legall precepts" which suggests the antinomianism of the Ranters.²⁴ In fact she declares that "this tenet of truth, I passed under the name of Amnomian". Trapnel, however, takes pains to distinguish her theology from antinomianism, and clarifies her meaning thus: "praised by the Lord, I was not one by adherency, though by imputation; Antinomianism was not inherent in me, or adhered to by me, this name in plain terms is liberty to sin" (*Legacy*, p.15). Her belief is centred wholly on the figure of Christ who personifies grace. Since the "Saints garment is Jesus Christ, and nothing can tear or rent, or defile this garment", faith in him is all that is necessary for beatification (*Legacy*, p.15).

Sarah Wight also participated in this "legall" discourse. In *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced*, Wight, like Trapnel, redefines the Mosaic law for the Saints, maintaining that there is still "*use of the Law*" in that it is "*holy, and the Command is holy, and just, and good*" even though it shows its failings in "*what it cannot doe*"²⁵, that is assume one's salvation. For Wight

Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness, to every one that beleeves. Beleevers can look on Christ in all things, and above all things. All the Commands are done and kept in beleeving in the Lord Jesus, who hath done and undergone all for beleevers (*Exceeding Riches*, pp.92-3).

During her mystical revelations Wight asked for a drink of water: "*Give me a little water good people; Christ hath given you water freely*". In her request she clearly intends to imply that Christ's sacrificial blood functions as a purifying water, washing away guilt (*Exceeding Riches*, p.21). Since He' had "take[n] the nature of man upon him" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.19), and "hath done and undergone all for beleevers", Christ advocates and embodies free grace. Therefore, Wight shares Trapnel's view that a true understanding of Christ's sacrifice allows her to perceive that there is little need for strict adherence to the Mosaic code of behaviour.

Thus, when during the section of the text which deals with "Qu[estions] about the LAW" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.92), a certain H.G. states: "The Law was our Schoolmaster to bring us to Christ", to which Sarah replies:

The Law was a Schoolmaster; by types it led out to Christ; but when Christ is come, and faith is come, wee are no longer under that Schoolmaster, and Tutor, and Governor, and rudiments, when the fulnes of time is come. (Exceeding Riches, p.93)

Although she suggests that the Saints are no longer under the command of the "Schoolmaster", like Trapnel, she stops short of preaching Antinomianism by affirming that

the best Saints that are, have need of the Word, of the Law and Gospel, of the Exhortations, because there's want in them; many things they see not, and are slow too. When one knows Christ in the Gospel of Christ, it's the speciall way to lead them on to the things of the Law. (Exceeding Riches, p.93)

With the implication that she is the one who "knows Christ" and so leads her followers "on to the things of the Law", which for her means "grace", she conveys the idea that faith and knowledge of Christ is all one needs to be assured of salvation.

Central to Wight's concept of free grace is the traditional Catholic idea of *imitatio Christi*, although J. Sears McGee has noted that Puritans do not come any closer to

imitatio Christi than a 1665 tract in which Thomas Brooks urges Christians to imitate Christ's example of "private prayer".²⁶ Indeed the fear and loathing of idolatry led many Puritans to distance themselves from the image of Christ. In his work, *Life Eternal* (1632) John Preston warned, for example, that: "We may not conceive [God] under any corporal shape [...] and therefore they that think they worship the humanity of Christ disjoined, are deceived".²⁷ And in 1646 Thomas Hooker clarified Preston's view, when he wrote that "Two contrary extremes cannot meet together", and that "Christ and our selves are two such contrary extremes is easy to see from their contrary originals, contrary effects".²⁸ Yet Sarah Wight argues that since "*Jesus Christ took our nature, to take part of our sufferings; and that we should follow him in sufferings*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.42). And although Anna Trapnel warned that "spirituall idolatry is the worst", she declared: "my experience teacheth me, that one may be a great worshipper of Idols, and yet never bow down to a picture" (*Legacy*, p.4). With this statement she advocates a form of *imitatio Christi* which remains implicit throughout her writing, and from which she derives strength and comfort in her suffering. Sarah Wight not only advocates *imitatio Christi*, but logically follows through the implications of this, calling for all "Men and Angels [...] and Devils too" to admire Christ's unification of Hooker's "contrary effects", rejoicing that, as she says, "I, even I am he" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.20). Sarah's own affirmation that divine visions show that she is united with Christ allow her to appropriate divine power and express her own political viewpoint: "*I am he. I'll make a New Covenant: I'll write my Law in their heart*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.20). Like Trapnel's idea on religious law, Wight emphasises mercy without the fear of divine wrath. She explains that this is due to her experience of knowing Christ. Christ, she points out, "*was made like to us, that he might sympathize with us*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.42)

For Trapnel free grace is a holy ointment, a "salve drawing out corruptions and ill humors", and is able to heal "the most desperate wound, [...] its cleaning physick, it runneth between the marrow and the bones". She addresses all "sinners", asking, "would you be rid of bloody sins?" and in so doing suggests that it is sin which enables humanity to know 'God' (*Legacy*, p.13). And associating sins with blood, she implies like Wight, that sins can simply be washed away, leaving a core of goodness which testifies to divine mercy. Thus Trapnel and Wight's reworking of what Trapnel describes as "legall precepts" ensures that the law is all-inclusive and all-forgiving, emphasising, as Wight puts it "*Redemption [and] freedome*" (*Exceeding Riches*, p.97).

In the same year as *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced* was published Mary Cary's *A Word in Season* was printed. This tract calls for the "Judges of England" to submit to the "raign" of Jesus Christ.²⁹ Cary implores the "Judges" to "Cast your Crowns at his feet, and submit your selves to his royall and glorious Authority" (*Word in Season*, p.3). For "Christ", according to Cary, "would govern [the people] by his own Lawes" of love, mercy and forgiveness. "[T]herefore", continues Cary's address to the judges,

make you no Laws for the consciences of his people, nor suffer any to do it by any authority derived from you; for that were to take the Crown off the head of Jesus Christ, and put it on your own head (*Word in Season*, p.3).

These words clearly arise from Cary's belief in the advent of the new Fifth Monarchy, but they nevertheless demonstrate her awareness that religious law was manipulated by both the "Rulers" and the "Judges of England". Indeed she is so certain Christ will return to rule the "kingdom" for a thousand years that she extends her warning to encompass those in power:

beware how you subject your selves, or your people in spirituall worship to any rules, but those that Jesus Christ hath appointed. Indeed such as are judged to be truly godly men, may give advise and counsell therein: but upon no Terms impose their counsell as a Law upon consciences (*Word in Season*, p.3).

Cary's concern is centred on the fact as she sees it that doctrines as rules of behaviour have replaced true worship. For Cary "spiritual worship" should focus on the "blessed" adoration of "the son" and she admonishes those who abuse their positions of trust and power by imposing "their counsell as a Law upon consciences". In order to re-affirm her point she quotes from Mark 7:7: "*In vain do you worship me, observing for Doctrines the commandments of men*" (*Word in Season*, p.3). If, she assures these rulers and judges of England, they follow her words of warning and advice, then "so shall the blessings of his grace be poured out upon you." If they do not then they remain on the "paths of destruction" (*Word in Season*, pp.3, 2). Together Elizabeth Avery, Anna Trapnel, Sarah Wight and Mary Cary are refusing legal dictums which they view as misdirected and unsuited to the new millennium.

Understanding religious law as a form of control of the self is particularly pertinent to their experience as women. As Fifth Monarchists, they claim the authority to challenge "legall precepts" from the movement itself, as well as from their relationship with "the divine spirit". As women they claim the authority to preach grace and redemption from their physical experiences as female representatives of fallen humanity. And as women preaching 'God's law' they are vulnerable to abuse. Indeed Mary Cary also cautioned the rulers and judges of England not to

enact any law against Saints exercising the gifts of the spirit, that are given to them in Preaching or prophesying: because the Lord hath promised in the latter dayes, to power out his spirit more abundantly upon all flesh, & your sons and your daughters shall prophesie (*Word in Season*, p.7).

Here Cary is referring to the authoritative rule of civil law and is clearly anticipating that those who enforce it will endeavour to prosecute "any Saints" who contravene or defy

"any law" which governs their behaviour.

A few years later Anna Trapnel recorded her suffering, and acknowledged a painful sense of exclusion from a culture ready to condemn her as an unruly preaching woman. Having endured "nicknames [...] scandals and reproaches", she tells her reader that she was a creature whom neither

Law nor Priest did not pity; legall threatnings, and legall promises looked upon me, but passed by and left me wallowing in blood, and pained with wounds (*Legacy*, p.13).

Here "legall threatnings, and legall promises" suggest the power of both civil and religious law. Her graphic language with its images of "wallowing in blood", and being left "pained with wounds", suggests a sense of helplessness as she is "passed by" and abandoned. Though Trapnel has constructed her text through her "own experience" of God as well as her familiarity with religious texts, she is in danger of regressing into a psychotic state of painful isolation.

At this point in *A Legacy for Saints*, Trapnel's prose describes a growing blackness, where "heaven was covered with clouds". She identifies one "dark cloud" which "had its first rising out of the Sea [...] This Sea in which my spirit received trouble and dark dissection, began to take hold of my [...] spirit" (*Legacy*, p.18). Blood, blackness, and a consuming sea seem to indicate an overwhelming sense of impotence and incomprehension. Of course, the darkness described here is suggestive of Irigaray's idea of "unknowledge" in which "the understanding" must be in a state of "virtual stupor" for Trapnel to be on the path to "grace", to the discovery, in Irigarayan terms, of "I". Theoretically, once she makes this discovery she will be "all comprehensive" ('*La Mystérique*', pp.194, 195). And indeed, when Trapnel writes that the "storms grew so fast, that [...] there grew a thick skin over my sight of union" (*Legacy*, p.18), she demonstrates an important level of perception. For her metaphor

of skin describes something tangible that is gradually blinding her, threatening her ability to function within the "legall" and political order. Because it is tangible it is comprehensible and can therefore be defined and controlled. She is thus able to identify, with the help of her heavenly "Mediator", and overcome what she describes as her hidden "enemies that kept me under," seeing them "dead and drowned in that red Sea, his blood" (*Legacy*, p.17). Significantly, her mystical values permit her to re-appropriate the power of the sea, so that it becomes Christ's blood which drowns her enemies. She can now write her experience of isolation confident in the knowledge that mystical communion enables her to identify the nature of her isolation and so overcome all difficulties: "when that which should be beneath gets uppermost", she warns, "then comes in confusion and darkness, [...] dark misty clouds [will] cover our sight" (*Legacy*, p.19). With the clarity of mystical illumination, however, Trapnel uses her writing as a means of self- empowerment, enabling her to construct a position in opposition to those with the power to issue legal threats in both the religious and civil forms.³⁰

As Cary predicted, Trapnel's encounter with both the religious and civil forms of the law as described in *A Legacy for Saints* takes a more severe form in *A Report and Plea*. This text details her journey to Cornwall where she means to preach her political and religious beliefs, and the opposition to her attempted instigation of social and political changes along Fifth Monarchist lines. In *A Report and Plea* Trapnel recounts how she was forced to defend herself against those who "upon their oaths present Anna Trapnell to be a dangerous seditious Person [intending] to stir up, and raise discord, rebellion and insurrection" (*Report*, p.52). Unmarried women like Trapnel were believed to be governed by "Passions and Practices that are against the Love and Concord of Christians, whatever pretence of an Angel of Light, or other Ministers of Righteousness, may be their Cloak", and "are undoubtedly from the dividing Devil".³¹

Seemingly, Trapnel's religious affirmations would not protect her and she was believed to be allied with the devil whose desire for a human agent led him, in popular opinion,

to imitate God, and to counterfeit his dealings with his Church. As God therefore hath made a covenant with his people so Satan joins in league with the world, laboring to bind some men unto him, that if it were profitable, he might draw them from the covenant of God, and therefore disgrace the same.³²

Thus, as far as the law was concerned Trapnel was willingly acting under Satan's influence when she journeyed to Cornwall to tell her prophecies, and was therefore guilty of the crime of witchcraft. On her arrest, Trapnel reported that some "justices [...] came to fetch me out of my bed, they made a great tumult, them and their followers, in the house, and some came up stairs, crying *A witch, a witch*" (*Report*, p.21). She was saved "this day from their cruelty", manifested particularly in the figure of the "witch-tryer-woman of that Town, [whom] some would fain have had come with her great pin which she used to thrust into witches, to try them", by "the Lord my God in whom I trust" (*Report*, p.22). In a trance-like state she sang and prayed until the people finally left her in peace. This proved to be a brief respite however, as she was summoned before the justices at the Session house, indicted on a charge of witchcraft. During her trial a point was made of her unmarried state that enabled her to journey from one "Country [to] another Country", and by a constant stream of questions about why she had travelled to Cornwall, the justices hope that Trapnel will "discover [her]self to be a witch". For they are certain that Trapnel has been drawn to Cornwall by the Devil:

Justice Launse: "*what moved you to such a journey?*"

A.T.: "*The Lord gave me leave to come...*"

Launse: "*...had you not some extraordinary impulses [of] Spirit, that brought you down?*"

A.T.: "*When you are capable [of] extraordinary impulse of Spirit, I will tell you*"; [...] for I saw how deridingly he spoke (*Report*, p.26).

Finally, the justices agreed that "*Sure this woman is no witch, for she speaks many good words, which witches could not*" (*Report*, p.28), and Trapnel was released. In *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608) William Perkins declared that a witch was one who aspired

to search out such things as God would have kept secret: and hence [...] is moved to attempt the cursed art of magic and witchcraft, as a way to get further knowledge in matters secret and not revealed.³³

The crucial point seems to be that in the case of mystics like Trapnel their knowledge was revealed, made known by divine revelation, rather than sought through devil worship. As Lelan Estes suggests, it seems to have been understood that the majority of women mystics avoided the Faustian 'cursed art of magic'.³⁴ Nevertheless, Trapnel enjoyed only the briefest period of freedom before she saw "Souldiers come to take [her]" (*Report*, p.27). She was arrested and sent to London, where she was imprisoned in Bridewell.

In Bridewell Trapnel juxtaposed "Satans prison" and "mans prison", equating the two: "that very month that I was set at liberty from Satans confinement, men confined me" (*Report*, p.30). The subtlety of "Sathan", who we are told by Trapnel, "came as an Angel of light, though I was so full of terror", epitomises the social systems in place to control women like herself.³⁵ She feels that the potent image of Satan appears to her to convince her that she is the epitome of evil, and writes that "I durst not speak to any that feared the Lord, nor I durst not have any prayer, because he said, I sinned if I prayed" (*Cry*, p.8). This echoes the pattern established by preachers like "Mr Peters", who attempt to instil into the individual a consciousness that she/he is complicit in her/his damnation. Reflecting on her conflicted state, Trapnel concluded that "Satan and my fearful nature joyned together". But Trapnel's mysticism enables her to identify these patterns of subtle control.

Affiliating patriarchal authority with the devil, Trapnel adopted mystical strategies to enable her to survive the horrors of her foul smelling, rat infested prison cell, requesting "the Lord secretly for purging grace, that I might go out of prison much more purified from the drosse of corruptions". Using her prison experience as a means of purgation, Trapnel declared after her release that prison "had been a purifying furnace to me" (*Report*, p.47). She was eventually released because she was able to convince the Council of State that she "suffered for Christ", not Satan (*Report*, p.46). Indeed, Trapnel seemed to be less afraid of these austere figures of authority than of the Devil, for she resisted their efforts to control her body and limit her speech as she sent defiance to all her accusers:

for a Witch; Pray, wherein can you make this appear? Oh you [...] Clergie there or in any other place, or at Court; [...] I am sure, I may defie this their speech, and will" (*Report*, p.49).

With this threat she promises to fulfil Cary's earlier warning to "the civill magistrate" who seeks to "imprison, punish, banish, or turn out of the world" the Saints who prophesied, when she wrote: "beware how you fall upon them, least they prove a burthensom stone unto you, and in falling upon them you be broken in pieces" (*Word in Season*, p.12). Cary's hoped that her words would "[if] possible prevent the breakings out of another fire of wrath, which otherwise, may suddenly break out upon this kingdom" (*Word in Season*, p.12). Referring to her work as a "cordiall" (*Word in Season*, p.12) she entreated "those that are in highest Authority" (*Word in Season*, p.12) to heed her words of warning, Trapnel, on the other hand, had become a victim of this "Authority" and vowed to do all in her power to defy them to the utmost.

Report and Plea certainly exemplifies Trapnel's self-empowerment since it is, as she affirms, a powerful "Declaration, through the assistance of the Lord, and not to set up my self and throw down others; but to throw down lies, and exalt truth" (*Report*,

p.48). Beginning by "Proclaiming the rage and strivings of the People" against herself, she cleverly uses *Report and Plea* as a means of self-vindication (*Report*, title page, and she recognises that the brutal behaviour of others towards her, "manifested in the harsh, rough, boisterous, rugged, inhumane and uncivil usage" of herself, occurred primarily because she was, as an unmarried woman preacher, consciously manipulating gender boundaries.

Neither Wight, Cary nor Avery were threatened in this way, but Trapnel was the only women member of the Fifth Monarchists to preach orally in the public sphere. Sarah Wight preached in her bedroom, Mary Cary and Elizabeth Avery through their written publications. Indeed, the experience of Margery Kempe two hundred and forty years earlier, had also shown that women visionaries who resisted the controlling figure of a husband were subjected to severe threats and punishment. Having been told "many tymes", "Damsel, forsake this lyfe that thou hast, & go spynnen, & carde as other women don, & suffyr so meche schame & so meche wo", Margery recalled that when visiting Canterbury she was threatened with execution as a heretic or Lollard.³⁶ Unable to tell whether Margery was possessed by "the Holy Gost", or whether she "hast a devyl wyth-in", she is surrounded by people who cry: "Tak & bren hir". She saves herself by convincing them that she is "neythyr eretyke ne loller" (*Kempe*, pp.28-9). Margery was vulnerable to such serious accusations because she resisted her prescribed role as wife and mother safely contained within the family home, preferring instead to travel, preaching God's word. This is made explicit in a later episode when she recalls that a "gret clerke browt forth a boke & leyd Seynt Powyl for hys party a-geyns hir that no woman xulde prechyn", in her defence she affirms her position as a preaching women who uses "comownycacyon & good wordys, & that wil I do whil I leve."(*Kempe*, p.126) Like Margery Kempe, Anna Trapnel defied social norms and struggled to fight

"oppressions" with "true speaking", so that "evill words, and unjust actions" were combated with "candid and charitable Constructions, and Spirituall Application" (*Report*, p.59). The difference between Margery's notions of "good words" and Trapnel's "true speaking" is that Trapnel's meaning encompassed political as well as spiritual concerns. In keeping with her Fifth Monarchist views she advocated "true speaking" as an approach to discourse which emphasised honesty and plain-speaking.

Words That Do Good

In *A Word in Season* Mary Cary wrote, "my words do good" as part of her argument for freedom of speech for radicals like herself (*Word in Season*, p.6). She addressed this tract to "the heads and rulers of the people" and stated that they had no right to "forbid any man to preach" (*Word in Season*, p.1). Cary made explicit her belief that prophecy

is strong and powerfull in confirming and comforting those that are called; & convincing, and converting those that are uncalled, to make a people holy and peculiar people to the Lord (*Word in Season*, p.6).

She believes in "the force of this argument" and reiterates the importance of "speaking thus" (*Word in Season*, p.6) about prophetic revelation. To "make a people holy" in this way prophecy had to be understood by all (*Word in Season*, p.6). One of the basic tenets of the Fifth Monarchy movement was accessibility, since they believed that anyone could become a 'saint'. Mary Cary epitomised the Fifth Monarchist view that their words had to be accessible to everyone when she wrote:

Let all the people, from the highest to the lowest, from the Kings that sits upon the Throne, to him that sits upon the Dunghill; let Parliament, and Synod, Citie and Country, attend to the insuing discourse (and let it sinke deep into their spirits)... (*Word in Season*, p.1)

If they were to achieve their aims then Parliament must hear them, and the greater their popular support then the more influence they could expect to yield in the political arena. Therefore even "the lowest" members of society were targeted by the organisation. In order to uphold the principle that anyone could become a saint, and in order to gain popular support, the Fifth Monarchists advocated a plainer linguistic style.

To influence as many readers as possible, their tracts would be simple, straightforward, and without the subtlety and elitism which they believed marked the traditional foundations of male politics. They were not unique in this strategy, as Christopher Hill points out when he states that there were others like the Fifth Monarchy, who published politico-religious tracts after 1641 and who avoided the witty rhetorical flourishes of court and university preachers. When politicians and pamphleteers, on both sides in the civil war, wanted to convince, Hill continues, they found the plain style almost essential.³⁷ Hill cites Daniel Defoe as an example, who wryly claimed that University education ruined English prose style by making gentlemen think in Latin; but there were others before Defoe, like Trapnel and Cary, who sought to break through what Hill describes as "this academic barrier".³⁸ As women, both Trapnel and Cary were aware that this 'academic' form of language excluded them just as effectively as it excluded "him that sits upon the Dunghill". The issue of language therefore carries greater significance than the more obvious meaning of straightforward comprehension.

Latinate, elitist, masculine discourse justifies itself by excluding both women and the speech of ordinary people, barring Trapnel and Cary who wished to involve themselves in the political sphere. Mary Cary pronounced her competence to preach good words even though she was among those who "have not all taken degrees in the schooles of men". She is qualified to "preach without ordination" because she allies

herself with those who "have been good proficientes in the schoole of Christ" (*Word in Season*, pp.6,7). Both Cary's and Trapnel's plainer forms of expression represent a departure from the hierarchical, ordered, masculine spirituality of both the pulpit and the Latin text, as she attacks the "deep speech gathered up and fetcht from both *Cambridge and Oxford Universities*", which she affirms

shal not affright the Lords flock, though they stammer, they shal be understood, [...] they shall understand fierce looks, and deep subtile speeches, though they be brought forth with a Latin tongue, and in Greek expressions, yet the wise-observing spirited ones shall understand the cunning works of the politik sophister (*Report*, pp.55-56).

By criticising those who propound "deep subtile speeches", Trapnel apprehends the danger implicit in the deceptive appearance of the "politik sophister" who is apparently genuine but deceptive, apparently logical but fallacious. According to Trapnel, allied with the exclusive masculine power of those in command of the "Latin tongue" and "Greek expressions" is a cunning and a fierceness which fails in its effort to confound those uneducated, but "wise-observing spirited ones". Indeed, she is one of those "wise-observing spirited ones" who are empowered by their mysticism and visionary learning to "true speaking", so that the power of elitist discourse is negated.

Trapnel's argument also suggests the oppositional relationship between Latin, a language so removed from lived experience, and a less forced, less premeditated discourse which she feels is more suited to her faith in "the glorious Lord [...] our Law-giver" (*Report*, p.56). She consequently invokes a form of expression involving spontaneity, emotion and immediacy which is lost in elitist forms of written language, and which she legitimises throughout her writing by affirming its divine source.

Like her female predecessors Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and St. Bridget, Trapnel enjoys a physical relationship with God, and like them

she feels she can bring the word of "the living God" (*Legacy*, p.7) to ordinary people.

Hildegard seems to have been the first woman writer to use the notion of a living God in a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux where she claims a sort of people's right to speak to him "in the name of the Living God", demanding that he "give heed" to her "queries".³⁹

Likewise, Trapnel uses, and relishes, the idea of God living through herself, her writing showing her willing embodiment of God's word, as she signifies God's presence through gesture and sound. Trapnel tells us that the voice of God

sounded into my spirit, which caused an echo, or answer from my spirit, [...] that small voice made such a report in my soul, which made me to listen; it was such a speaking that I had not heard before, therefore it was very strange to me.
(*Legacy*, p.7)

We are often reminded of her praying and "singing-melody" (*Report*, p.5), which, along with the sounds and echoes that mark her communication with the divine, represents a response more direct and spontaneous than words. Nevertheless, she knows that words must remain the medium of her communication of her illuminative experience. Indeed, several centuries earlier, Hildegard had recognised the need to translate the fruits of her visionary learning so as to "make it intelligible to mankind". As Hildegard pointed out, visionary learning is in the first instance "written [...] in a language given" to the mystic "from above, rather than in ordinary human speech, since it was not revealed [...] in that form".⁴⁰ And just as Hildegard literalised the notion of a living God, so Trapnel in *Report and Plea*, expressed the desire 'that I might be onely a voyce, and Christ the sound' (*Report*, p.29).

This impacts on Irigaray's argument that the woman mystic is "transformed into Him in her love: this is the secret of their exchange" ('*La Mystérique*', p.201). It is significant that in the ecstasies of a mystical union which communicates knowledge and understanding, the mystic loses all sense of corporeal boundary. Theoretically, in Irigaray's rationale, the interactive nature of the relationship between the divine spirit

and the woman mystic, which Trapnel demonstrates, is a positive step in the search for selfhood, enabling the mystic, as Trapnel again demonstrates, to articulate her self in discourse and challenge traditional social and religious practices. Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that the relationship between fluidity of identity and female essence can also be self-threatening. Keith Thomas, for example, has claimed that Trapnel was among those who failed to distinguish between the inner spirit and its earthly vessel.⁴¹ He quotes from *The Cry of a Stone* in which Trapnel says, "Some poor creatures call themselves Christ [and] because of this oneness with Christ they will have no distinguishing" (*Cry*, p.66). And in *A Legacy for Saints*, she writes that the "strengthening of the Inward Man" is concurrent with the "decaying of the Outward" (*Legacy*, p.25). Thus it seems that in converging her self with the Divine, Trapnel cannot reconcile her inner self, which she devotes to God, with her outer self, her public identity. Indeed, the logical conclusion of Irigaray's concept of fluidity would seem to be a crisis of self-identity, for she states that "Woman is not related to any simple designatable being, subject, or entity [...] Woman is a common noun for which no identity can be identified".⁴² So although her fluidity allows "woman" to elude definition, because she is unidentifiable she is in danger of experiencing "exclusion from her self" (*Speculum*, p.231). Certainly, Trapnel's frequent descents into a psychotic state of isolation and helplessness suggest that we cannot escape the fact that such a crisis is an ever present threat to the female mystic.

According to Irigaray woman is fluid in that she is "neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, in-finite, *form is never complete in her*." (*Speculum*, p.229) For Irigaray, this "incompleteness in her form [...] allows her continually to become something else" (*Speculum*, p.229). Crucially, women's incompleteness of form actually works against the symbolic order since, claims Irigaray, this means that she is not "a unit(y), such as letter, number, figure in a series, proper noun, unique object (in a) world of the senses"

(*Speculum*, p.229). If then, "woman" is "neither open nor closed", neither a "proper noun" or a "unique object", is she nothing to herself? The answer to this question is, of course, no. As this thesis has demonstrated in chapters three and five, the so called 'empty space' within "woman" is filled with a female essence, and it is precisely the seemingly psychotic lapses that enable women like Anna Trapnel to discover this essential core of being.

This discovery clearly manifests itself in the style of Trapnel's writing. Her literary style seems to offer a striking parallel to Irigaray's point about the elusive nature of "woman". Anyone reading Trapnel for the first time will immediately notice her unique use of punctuation. There is a deliberate lack of full stops so that each sentence, phrase, or argument, flows into the next one. This can be effective when combined with images of "flowing rivers of living water", and "pourings forth of the Spirit" (*Legacy*, pp.34, 37) as she merges her self with God. There will, however, always be a danger that the clarity of her argument will be affected. But perhaps this is precisely Trapnel's point. How can you be consistently clear about visions which appear real but are not? For example, she tells how, when walking

along the streets, I have looked behind me, thinking I had heard some locall voice, a voice without me, but sure it was because I was unaquainted with the voice of the Spirit speaking in, or to the soul; I oft-times turned back when I have been going along the streets, to see who it was that spake, taking that for visible which was invisible (*Legacy*, pp.7-8).

How can you clearly describe that which is indescribable? As Trapnel quite rightly states when writing about "the Invisible God" (*Report*, p.21) there must be a failure of language, for "no tongue is able to speak it out, the pen of the readiest writer cannot write this, [...] it is a thing impossible to be published" (*Legacy*, p.11). Trapnel crucially recognises that language is incapable of catching and defining that which cannot be caught, cannot be defined. Equating this with her own experience of

persecution, she bespeaks an awareness that no one person can impose scribal authority over her, enabling her to realise the power of language. Thus reinforcing her desire to combat "evill words, and unjust actions, [to] find fault with oppressions, [and] labour to amend them with candid and charitable Constructions" (*Report*, p.59), the content of her work cleverly reflects the elusiveness and intangibility of mystical experience.

Despite her fluidity of expression, Trapnel's writing is also seen to be methodical. From the outset of her public career Anna Trapnel was reputed to be a skilled linguist. The reading public, for instance, were told in *Strange News from White Hall* that

Her prayers are in exceeding good method, and order, good language, and such as indeed all that come do much admire what they hear from her, excellent words, and well placed, such are not ordinary.⁴³

Like her spoken "prayers", her writing evinces both her expertise with language and the obvious enjoyment she takes in the successful manipulation of words. In recounting her exchange with the justices in Cornwall, for example, she displays her own dexterity in argument:

I said, "*Why may I not pray with many people in the room, as well as your professing woman that prays before men and women, she knowing them to be there; but I know not that there is anybody in the room when I pray: and if you indict one for praying, why not another? Why are you so partial in your doings?*"

Justice Lobb. "*But you don't pray so as others.*"

A.T. "*I pray in my chamber.*"

Justice Trabel. "*Your chamber!*"

A.T. "*Yea, that it's my chamber while I am there, through the pleasure of my friends*" (*Report*, p.28).

Trapnel's dextrous facility with language ensures that she wins her argument. As Hilary Hinds has pointed out, Trapnel targets the inconsistencies and contradictions in her opponents' arguments and reads them to her own advantage.⁴⁴ But this disputative strategy opposes the enigmatical language she uses to describe and convey her mystical learning.

How can we reconcile her elusive language with the intimation that her language is also disciplined and orderly? In the male space of the courtroom, and confronted with male figures of authority who have the power of life and death over her, she seems to undermine their power by destabilising the meaning of the words of both justice's, and appropriating their terms and reinvesting them with her own meanings. Yet Irigaray has drawn attention to the fact that this is a less successful strategy of resistance since it perpetuates the power relations within the symbolic order. By challenging the justices as she does Trapnel unwittingly speaks as a masculine subject.⁴⁵ However, Trapnel immediately follows this relation by denying that they were her words:

the Lord put all in my mouth, and told me what I should say, and that from the written word, he put it in my memory and mouth: so that I will have nothing ascribed to me (*Report*, p.28).

In so far as "the Lord" is the ultimate patriarch this appears problematic, yet it enables Trapnel to revert to her favoured forms of language, such as the "spirituall songs" she goes on to sing. So that when the soldiers come to arrest her she has experienced "so much of the refreshings of God", her "ordinary capacity" is "overcome", and she says: "I felt not the trotting of the horse [which was carrying her back to imprisonment in London], nor minded anything but the spiritual" (*Report*, p.27). Her "ordinary capacity" suggests her place in the symbolic order which her relationship with 'God' enables her to transcend. This fluctuation between one (masculinised) form of expression and another (feminised) one is repeated at the end of *Report and Plea*, which closes with a

Defiance to all reproachfull, scandalous, base, horrid, defaming speeches, which have been vented by Rulers, Clergy, and their Auditors [...] against *Anna Trapnell* (*Report*, p.49).

Her "Defiance" is a witty piece of rhetoric in which she again re-appropriates the terms of those who have been her enemies in order to repudiate their slanders.

Answering the charge of vagrancy, Trapnel works through the various definitions of 'vagabond', and demonstrate how none of these definitions can be applied to her:

I lived with my mother till shee dyed, [...] then I kept house with the means my Mother left me, and payed taxes [...] I sold my Plate and Rings, and gave the mony to the Publick use; you did not call me vagabond then; I am compel'd, as I told you, to bring my private Spirit forth to the view of the world, and to declare my free-will-offering, yet not boastingly, but so as that the world may judge whether this term of vagabond will hold good concerning me; [...] you have taxes from me still; and am I a vagabond for this? Ask your Lawyers, will they not say you were much to blame herein? Let all that knew me, speak, when they saw or knew me a vagabond (*Report*, p.50).

Working out her argument logically, she is stung to this response by the injustice of her treatment. Since the idea of herself as "woman" is constructed by those who attempt to oppress her, Trapnel's writing presents a challenge to those who assume the power to name, define, and control her. This challenge is clearly manifesting itself here as she exposes the "evill words" and "unjust actions" of those who exercise power over her. Her exposition enables her to see unjust manifestations of masculine power as careful constructs. Though she uses the discourse that is assigned to her, in this instance she is still able to offer her own construction of her self as the embodiment of "true speaking" (*Report*, p.59). She intends that the "*Cornwell Clergie*, and Justices" shall see their "evill" by looking on herself. Since she represents "the living God", the "trespasse" they have done against her is also a trespasse against 'God', and she accordingly warns them to repent and humble their "souls before the Lord, against whom you have sinned" (*Report*, p.53). She draws to a close by emphasising the

opposition of masculine and feminine values in the references to "operative Nature" which enables the soul to swim in the "comforting refreshing River, [which] is Water of Life", and to the complete ineffectiveness of "mens strong liquors of Arts and Sciences" in nurturing the soul (*Report*, p.57). "Men", and especially the "Clergy", are criticised for advocating a value system which seeks to oppress in their commitment to maintaining a social order which depends on the power of "humane invention" (*Report*, p.57). Finding "fault with oppressions", she urges the Saints to "labour to amend them" by means of a "Spiritual Application" (*Report*, p.59).

Just as the relationship between the mystic and her 'God' is founded upon the fluctuating circumstances of being and not being, so Trapnel's facility with language and her "spiritual application" testifies that she fluctuates between rational and irrational modes of authorship. Along with the images of fluidity, Trapnel's association of physically and spiritually based language demonstrates her attempt to resist interpretation by those only too ready to consign her writing to the confines of the domestic and familial, instead of engaging in the seemingly immodest act of public and political utterance. Trapnel converges her self with an image of the divine, manipulates her public image, her self-representation and varies her forms of discourse, in order to resist a masculinised definition as either "devillish" witch or unruly "vagabond". It is therefore in the juxtaposition of spiritual and disputative modes of expression that enables her to confront the controlling power of those who feel it is their province to name and define: "I may defie this their speech and will" (*Report*, p.49). She thus successfully challenges Cromwell's agents and the Council of State, as well as ensuring that her prophetic voice is not manipulated by the Fifth Monarchists for their own ends.

Like Anna Trapnel, Mary Cary also invests her writing with a challenge to those who assume the power to name, define, and control her. In her double publication, *The Little Horns Doom and New Jerusalem's Glory* (1651), which was written seven years

before it was published, Cary identifies herself with "the many pious, precious, prudent, and sage Matrons, and holy women, with which this Common wealth is adorned", and explains that she "cannot", indeed, "dare not, with-hold neither of them from publick view any longer" because, as she says, "now these things are fulfilled; and prophesies are then best understood, when they are fulfilled."⁴⁶ As Henry Jessey explains, Cary's prophecies concern the "*application [...] of the little Horn, to the late King; [...] and Christ's kingdom's being in its compleat glory to 1701*", and are in his opinion cited and explained "*with much cleverness*".⁴⁷

As one of the "daughters of God", Cary assumes an equal right to expound 'His' word and asserts:

I have from my childhood, but especially since I was fifteen years of age, been [...] by the Spirit of God, set upon a serious and continual study of the Scriptures.⁴⁸

By the time she publishes her first texts in 1647 and 1648, Cary is about 26 years old, therefore the skill and ability necessary to preach derive from her long study of scripture. This is reinforced, however, by her claim that she is divinely empowered. In her prefatory letter to the reader in the first edition of *The Resurrection of the Witnesses* (1648), Cary repeats the phrase: "I am God" four times in twenty-five lines. Again, this suggests the self-deification which marks women's mystical experience. Invoking this level of godly power, Cary displays a calm self-assurance and self-possession, writing for example, that

for my own part, such and so great is the confidence of this thing, which I have had, and have, [that] I have frequently declared unto all those Christian Acquaintance with whom I have had occasion to converse, upon all the occasions of the of the oppositions that have been made against the Saints in *England* [...] I say I have upon all occasions declared my confidence of victory on the Saints side, saying they should never be overcome (*Resurrection*, p.xxiv).

In her affirmation of success, which is based on both her study of Scripture and on mystical revelation, she is manifestly proud, and projects an imposing self-image. Since Cary believed that "all Saints have in a measure a spirit of Prophesie" (*Little Horns Doom and New Jerusalem's Glory* p.106), her basic argument was centred on the notion that one's knowledge of God's promises, followed by their historical realisation, led to faith in the "punctual fulfilling of [further] prophecies and promises" (*Little Horns Doom and New Jerusalem's Glory* p.ix). Her religious and political beliefs were therefore unified in her aim to inspire as many as possible to attain to sainthood. Indeed in the 1653 edition of *The Resurrection of the Witnesses*, Cary congratulates herself on her success in correctly predicting "how those things which I then [five years ago] asserted in the Treatise, and in my Epistles thereto prefixed, and in the Post-script then printed, have been fulfilled in a continued series of Providences ever since" (*Resurrection*, p.viii). For this means, as she declares, that "many that could not then be perswaded that it was so as I then affirmed [...] do now believe them to be true" (*Resurrection*, p.viii). To persuade more of the populace to believe in the Fifth Monarchy movement the second edition was published, although Cary bemoaned how "dull of apprehension [were] God's own people" (*Resurrection*, p.ix).

Of course the 'Saints' which Cary sought to recruit in "*England [which was] the richest ship in the World; for God hath more of those precious jewels in it, than he doth in any other kingdom in the World*", were not only to function as "witnesses" (*Resurrection*, p.50) to the second coming of Christ, they were also called upon to act on behalf of the Fifth Monarchy. Because of "the war being made against [...] the Saints in *England*" the saints must strive to prevail (*Resurrection*, p.50). Whereas Anna Trapnel's activity took the form of travelling about the country to preach Fifth Monarchist doctrine, as well as in her written work, Cary's activity concentrated on the interpretation of the

mysteries of God so that their especial relevance to the Fifth Monarchists was uncovered.

The political threat was implicit in the public proclamation of their beliefs as Fifth Monarchist women prophets. As we know from the fact that Mary Cary's politico-religious pamphlets were read out in parliament, her work carried a significant political potential. In *Resurrection of the Witnesses* she also advocates a programme of unification among the separatist groups since she sees that, united, they would be able to wield a greater political power. She writes that "the war" was "made against all the Witnesses, against all Saints," but it was also about the "rooting out of [all that] were called Puritans, and Independents, and Brownists" (*Resurrection*, p.50). Indeed, writing in 1653, she sees this as the chief aim of "that war" so that there would be "no more Puritans in *England*, than there were Protestants in *Rome*" (*Resurrection*, p.50). For Cary, the only way to consolidate their power as an opposing force is for all "Puritans, and Independents, and Brownists," along with along with Anabaptists, and even those who had earlier sided with the "Beast" (*Resurrection*, pp.94, 97) Charles I, must join together under the Fifth Monarchist cause. Although Cary's words are intended to incite those who would "overcome the enemy" (*Resurrection*, p.51), which at this point was Cromwell, Trapnel's activities were clearly seen to be more overtly seditious since she was arrested and imprisoned. Indeed, the more explicit anti-Cromwellian sub-text of her proclamations inevitably doomed her to persecution.

Trapnel's attacks on Cromwell in 1654 declared her to be a source of danger to the protectorate. As Hinds points out, Trapnel's concern is with language as an authoritative manifestation of divine truth, accordingly one's linguistic ability functions as a measure of one's inner nobility and godliness, or of one's inherent baseness and impiety.⁴⁹ When Cromwell gave the Fifth Monarchy his support, Trapnel had suggested that Cromwell had been "Gideon, going before Israel, blowing the Trumpet of courage

and valour". Later, following the dissolution of the Barebones parliament in 1653, she felt that he had betrayed the Fifth Monarchist cause and had a very different vision.

Cromwell was then shown to be one

of the deadnesse of Gideons spirit to the work of the Lord, shewing me that he was laid aside, as to any great matters, the Lord having finished the greatest businesse that he would employ him in (Cry, pp.6,10).

She therefore anticipates that "God" will afflict him with a "stammering speech" in order to show the extent of his contrary behaviour:

How can he do any living things among dead men, dead things? Does he not confound himself in his own Language? do not his actions flye in his face? does not his conscience say, 'thou tongue, thou saiest not right?' [...] I tell you the Lord God will eclipse your Glory, he will put a stammering speech into you, you shall not suck from God's Wine-cellars (Cry, p.68).

Referring to the tower of Babel, which in the Old Testament is the archetypal place of confused languages (Gen. 11:1 ff), Trapnel is pointing to the contradictory nature of Cromwell's politics which defy the heavenly order ordained by God as she sees it. Throughout her work Trapnel had promised to exalt truth and put down the lies of both the clergy and the Cromwellian regime. Trapnel reports that Cromwell's lies are highlighted in the claim that he "says he is not against us, but for us" (Cry, p68). He thus "confounds" himself, for his actions against both herself and the Fifth Monarchy movement belie his words. And since God "will put a stammering speech into" him, Trapnel implies that Heaven will not permit such a disparity to continue. For Trapnel, language, actions and truth are all interrelated and, ideally, in alignment. The perspective between a natural harmony of language and truth is reiterated in many places in Trapnel's text, and she constantly warns those who "smite with [their] tongue" (Cry, p.56) of the dangers of damnation, and writes to all "men [who have] mudded [language] *Oh that I could thee trembling see / before the truth indeed*" (Cry, pp.50, 53).

Trapnel's prophecies show that her public concerns were translated into her visions, so that like Cary her religious and political beliefs were unified. Indeed, her political motivations and her anti-Cromwellian beliefs are further expressed in the notorious account of the field of bulls. Here Trapnel, stranded in a field of bulls, is under threat from the New Model Army, and her immediate danger comes from a familiar figure, as she writes:

I saw great darkness in the Earth, [...] and I beheld at a little distance a great company of Cattel, some like Bulls, and others like Oxen, [...] their faces and heads like men, [...] For the foremost, his Countenance was perfectly like unto *Oliver Cromwels*; and on a suddain there was a great shout of those that followed him, he being singled out alone, [...] and immediately they prompting him and fawning upon him, he run at me (*Cry*, p.13).

In the midst of an all-consuming darkness, Trapnel is rescued by Christ, whose "arm and hand clapsed" her, pulling her to safety just as Cromwell's "horn" nears Trapnel's breast. She also sees many other "Saints that stood in the way of him, [and] looked boldly in his face" (*Cry*, p.13). This vision was central to the authentication of the Fifth Monarchist cause, and the vision is repeated in part in both *Strange News from White Hall* and *A Legacy for Saints*. In *A Legacy for Saints* Trapnel herself interprets it as a reflection of the struggle between Fifth Monarchists and Parliament, as she issues a warning to all

Saints, [to] stand upon your watch, for certainly Antichrist, which is the beast spoken of, that shall appear like a Lamb, but with his two horns shall gore as a beast, for so his nature is (*Legacy*, p.44).

Trapnel is clear that the Saints have to guard against the power of Parliament which is also symbolised by

his two horns, the one is subtle policy, or a secret sophistry, and the other horn an open power, [...] the one horn worketh under ground, making the ground hollow, the other horn is a more visible power, pushing those that work not with them (*Legacy*, p.44).

So subversive and contentious was this vision that, at her trial Justice Lobb gives the order: "*Read a vision of the horns out of the book [which written from something said at White-Hall]*", thus using her vision as a major piece of evidence against her (*Report*, p.25). But the justices cannot convict her on this evidence since she frequently balances political commentary with divine authority, claiming that her visions are "Scripture" which "came in with a very great strength in the midst of Divine contemplation", and "these Scripture languages were spoken to me in spirit" (*Legacy*, pp.27-8). By emphasising her godliness and inner nobility through divine authority Trapnel reconciles the differences between functioning as a mystic and assuming authorial control over her words.

It is as a preaching mystic that Trapnel challenges social preconceptions that attempt to marginalise or exclude her. If Trapnel holds a position strong enough to, as she puts it, "write defiance", then it seems as if her relationship with God enables her to unite her "inward" and "outward" selves (*Report*, p.58). At the beginning of *Report and Plea*, Trapnel assures her reader that it is "Through grace I am what I am". Indeed, Trapnel is so self-assured and confident of God's grace that it simply does not matter if she can "tell, whether [she] was in body or out". Crucially she is able to confirm, "I sung with understanding". And her understanding is that, spiritually, the opposites of female and male are united, becoming equal "among the sonnes and daughters of men" (*Report*, p.42). United with Christ

by an act of grace through the blood of the Lord Jesus, which I clearly saw by the light of the Spirit, bearing witness to my Spirit, that Christ was mine, and I was his (*Legacy*, p.8),

she also unites with her self. In keeping with her style of writing in which Trapnel's beliefs are worked out through liquid images of blood, wine and water, the numerous visions she records of "the blood of the Lord Jesus" (*Legacy*, p.8) connect the contrary

extremes of heavenly and earthly, revealing her political motivations. Thus, like Sarah Wight, Trapnel can jubilantly claim that through the sacrifice of Christ's blood "was I made like my Saviour, [...] in this year I was new-born" (*Legacy*, pp.11-12). She presents her redemption as rebirth, as re-construction. Trapnel's work, reiterating both the idea that the female body is just as redeemable through the body of Christ as that of any male's, and emphasising the importance of ordinary speech, carefully makes it explicit that God's message includes women as well as men: "Oh to be in Christ! Who can tell out his or her estate, night and day?" (*Legacy*, p.12).

Two centuries earlier Margery Kempe had demonstrated that although uneducated, women possessed the "witte & wisdom to answeryn so many lernyd men", in the seventeenth century, the Fifth Monarchy women demonstrate that women possess the wit and wisdom to question many learned men (*Kempe*, p.128). As one who sees herself as having been blessed with the "gifts of speaking to edification" (*Word in Season*, p.5), Mary Cary uses her writing to question "those that have taken such and such degrees in the Schooles" (*Word in Season*, p.6) on matters of social, political and religious importance, such as the "Oppression of the poor", the abundance of vice, and "The troubling, wronging, and oppressing the Saints of Jesus" (*Word in Season*, p.1). Therefore, when Cary wrote that "Not only men, but women shall prophecy; not only those who have University-learning, but those who have it not; even servants and hand maides," on the grounds that "many learned, godly Ministers have confessed that they have learned many spirituall truths of Jesus Christ from such as have had no learning" (*Word in Season*, p.5) she was aiming to translate the Fifth Monarchists concept of spiritual equality into social and sexual equality. Though her words were authorised by their appearance in print, in affirming that her plea of social and sexual equality arose from her illuminating experience of the "pourings forth of the spirit" (*Word in Season*, p.7), she gives it the added potency of divine authorisation. In

A Legacy for Saints Trapnel emphasises the significance of this illumination, writing of those who "shall be stricken with blindness" unless they open themselves to new ideas and ways of seeing. Though Trapnel praises "the brave ones of the world" who triumph over "Obscurity", she shifts the emphasis suggested firstly by Sarah Wight, from the idea of woman as an "empty nothing creature", to the more positive idea of being open to "new ways of seeing" (*Legacy*, pp.15,19). Trapnel's innovative message is addressed primarily to all "Saints", both female and male, yet her references to experiencing a "darkness before a freedom", and to a "soul" which "hath a freedom from legall bondage" seem to speak more to women who might be influenced by her example of strength and determination (*Legacy*, p.19).

NOTES

- 1 Elizabeth Avery, *Scripture-Prophecies Opened* (1647) Wing A4272, p.1. Hereafter cited in the text as *Scripture-Prophecies*.
- 2 See this thesis chapter four, p.117.
- 3 See this thesis chapter four, p.119.
- 4 See Irigaray's discussion of the power of discourse in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, rpt. 1993), pp.68-85. Hereafter cited in the text as *This Sex*.
- 5 Luce Irigaray, 'La Mystérique' in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, rpt 1994), pp.191-202, p.191. Hereafter cited in the text as 'La Mystérique'.
- 6 Anna Trapnel, *A Legacy for Saints* (1654) Wing T2032, TT 806(1), p.1. Hereafter cited in the text as *Legacy*.
- 7 Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholia III* ed. Holbrook Jackson (London: Everyman's Library, 1932), pp.395-408.
- 8 The Old and New Testaments record several codes of law, such as the Covenant Code in Exodus which contains rules governing slavery, murder and theft (Exod. 21-3), and the Deuteronomic Code, which takes the form of a speech made by Moses to the people of Israel before their entry into the Promised Land, and in which the observance of the law is made a condition of the covenant of grace (Deut. 12-26). In both Romans and 2 Corinthians Paul identifies Moses as the supreme giver of the Law, emphasising faith in God (Rom. 9:15, 2 Cor. 3:13). Paul himself preached moral restraint, and sought to separate his Churches from Judaism, since he was hostile to the idea put forward by certain Jewish Christians who followed the requirements of the Jewish Law before being accepted for baptism. For Paul two kinds of justification were impossible. The suggestion that the means of salvation already available in Judaism by conforming to the Jewish law of circumcision and by observing dietary regulations meant, as Paul understood it, that Christ's sacrifice was not necessary. He therefore preached the belief that "the Gentiles" form their own community and live according to laws of love and holiness (Rom. 13, 15:7,9).
- 9 From John Marbeck, *A Booke of Notes and Common Places* (1581), p.615, quoted in Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in Paradise Lost* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.215. Spenser's description of Redcrosse's encounter with Despaire in Book One of *The Faerie Queene*; Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*; Shakespeare's depiction of Claudius's despair in *Hamlet*; and *Macbeth* are just a few notable examples of misery and despair.
- 10 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* 10.16, 731-32. All references to *Paradise Lost* within the text are to Merritt Y. Hughes (ed.) *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: Odyssey, 1957). Jason Rosenblatt points to the poignancy of Adam's soliloquy in Book 10, which begins:

O miserable of happy! is this the end
 Of this new glorious World, and mee so late
 The Glory of that Glory, who now become
 Accurst of blessed, hide me from the face
 Of God, whom to behold was then my highth
 Of Happiness: yet well, if here would end
 The misery, I deserv'd it, and would bear
 My own deservings. (*Paradise Lost* 10. 720-27)

Adam's emotive reflections on his sinful state recalls Satan's acknowledgement of his misery in Book 4 with the exclamation, "Me miserable" (4.73), and suggests that this is a form of death. As Rosenblatt notes, of the four degrees of death outlined in *De doctrina Christiana*, the worst is spiritual death, whereby sinners are "forever excluded from the fellowship of God, and of the blessed". (Mat. 25-41), Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law*, p.205.

- 11 From John Milton, *De doctrina Christiana* in Don M. Wolfe (gen. Ed.) *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (8 vols.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), 6:518, quoted in Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law* p.206.
- 12 Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law*, p.214
- 13 See Susan Snyder, 'The Left Hand of God: Despair in the Medieval and Renaissance Tradition' in *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965), pp.18-59, p.24.
- 14 In the Old Testament 'grace' was simply God's kindness towards the people of Israel. The book of Zechariah mentions God's "spirit of grace", while the books of Exodus and Isaiah record God's graciousness, mercy and kindness (Zech. 12:10, Exod. 33:19, Isa. 63:7).
- 15 Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law*, p.216.
- 16 Rosenblatt points out that those who did not accept the grace which Christ's sacrifice made possible theologians of the Reformation invoked the "relentlessness of the law". He quotes Calvin, who wrote: "The evil commeth of ourselves [...] It is no marvel then, that God in his lawe shoulde have no regard to mans abilitie or unabilitie, but rather to the dutie which we owe him, or that he shoulde require the right that belongeth to him [...] If wee had continued in our integritie, and not beene perverted and corrupted through sinne, then should we have beene able to have discharged all that God requireth of us in his lawe. That is certaine." See *Torah and Law*, p.211.
- 17 See Snyder, 'The Left Hand of God', pp.21-2.
- 18 Ibid., p.22
- 19 Ibid., p.30.
- 20 Irigaray gathers together philosophical discourse and the phallogocratic order under the umbrella term, "systématicité", and maintains that the only way to move beyond or away from its power is to interrogate the conditions under which

systematicity itself is possible, see *This Sex*, p.75.

- 21 See this thesis chapter four, p.119.
- 22 Quoted in Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (eds.), *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.23.
- 23 *XVI Revelations of Divine Love, Shewed to a Devout Servant of our Lord called Mother Juliana, and Anchorette of Norwich* (1670) Wing C6903, pp.34-5. Hereafter cited in the text as *Revelations*.
- 24 See this thesis chapter two, p.29.
- 25 Henry Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced* (1647) Wing J687, pp.92-3. Hereafter cited in the text as *Exceeding Riches*.
- 26 Thomas Brooks, *Works*, II; pp.170-171, quoted in J. Sears McGee, 'Conversion and the Imitation of Christ in Anglican and Puritan Writing' in *The Journal of British Studies* 15 (1976), pp.20-39, p.28.
- 27 John Preston, *Life Eternal* (3rd ed. Corr., 1632), pt.2, pp.44-45, quoted in Sears McGee, 'Conversion and the Imitation of Christ', p.27.
- 28 Thomas Hooker, *Heautonaparnumenos* (1646), pp.47-8 quoted in Sears McGee, *Ibid.*, p.28.
- 29 Mary Cary, *A Word in Season* (1647) TT E393(26), p.3. Hereafter cited in the text as *Word in Season*.
- 30 See, for example, Trapnel's letter to the reader at the beginning of *Report and Plea* (1654) Wing T2033. Hereafter cited in the text as *Report*.
- 31 Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* (1691) Wing, B1214, p.238.
- 32 William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608), quoted in Lelan L. Estes, 'Good Witches, Wise Men, Astrologers, and Scientists: William Perkins and the Limits of the European Witch-Hunts' in Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (eds.), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe* (Washington: Folger, 1988), pp.154-65, p.156.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 Estes, 'Good Witches, Wise Men', p.156.
- 35 Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (1654) Wing T2031, TT E730(3), p.8. Hereafter cited in the text as *Cry*
- 36 Sanford Brown Meech (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), p.129. Hereafter cited in the text as *Kempe*.

- 37 Christopher Hill, 'Radical Prose in 17th Century England: From Marprelate to the Levellers' in *Essays in Criticism* 32 (1982), pp.95-118, p.102.
- 38 Ibid, p.103.
- 39 Letter from Hildegard to Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux 1146-47 in Baird and Ehrman (eds.), *Letters of Hildegard*, p.27.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1971, rpt., 1991), p.161.
- 42 From Irigaray's chapter on fluidity in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p.230. Hereafter cited in the text as *Speculum*.
- 43 *The Faithful Scout Impartially comprising Strange News from White Hall* (extract from "Munday, Jan, 16" 1654). See also *Strange News from White Hall* (1654) TT E224(3).
- 44 Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.128.
- 45 See Irigaray's chapter on the power of discourse in *This Sex*, pp.68-85, especially p.76.
- 46 Mary Cary, *The Little Horns Doom and New Jerusalem's Glory* (1651) Wing C736, pp.ii, ix-x. Hereafter cited in the text as *Little Horns Doom* and *New Jerusalem's Glory* respectively.
- 47 Ibid., see '*Touching this Treatise the Judgement of H. Jessey*', p.xx.
- 48 Mary Cary, *The Resurrection of the Witness* 1653 edn. TT E719(2), p.xxiii. Hereafter cited in the text as *Resurrection*.
- 49 Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, p.125.
- 50 The greater part of Cary's text, *A Word in Season*, deals with the issue of right of prophets to speak their visionary learning, see pp.4-12.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of writings by Hildegard of Bingen, St. Bridget, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, Sarah Wight, Anna Trapnel, Mary Cary and Elizabeth Avery clearly shows that their mystical experience and the language used to describe it comprises a feminised discourse which embraces the very concepts of "woman" that had long designated women inferior: irrationality, fluidity, physical corruption and nothingness. In Irigarayan terms this process is achieved so that women can express desire. The articulation of their desire is not limited to love, passion or lust, but is extended to incorporate self-discovery, public speaking and politics.

From Hildegard of Bingen to Anna Trapnel, the women mystics we have encountered in this thesis manipulate dominant ideas, such as love of God, trust in God, humility and subjection to God's will, which are used to justify and perpetuate the hierarchical ideas upon which the symbolic order is founded. For women, mystical experience begins with the suspension of rationalised modes of thought and behaviour, and it encompasses self-deification in the 'Word' that is made flesh as 'God' communicates through the mystic. This is the ultimate form of empowerment, especially as 'His' will was understood to have sought out 'despised' female flesh for this purpose. The female body is therefore authorised as the site of mystical union, and the language of mystical union reveals the extent to which women mystics, once empowered, resisted the cultural and ideological constructs that were used to keep them subservient within the symbolic order, discovering in this resistance the divinity of the human body.

Expressing their desire through eroticised mystical discourse, women like Julian of Norwich and Anna Trapnel, demonstrated that the body was the only way to experience contact with a divine force. And they were so successful in transmitting this

message that men, like John Rogers, also took comfort in the notion that in gratifying physical urges they would not necessarily be courting their own damnation. Indeed the magnitude of the Fifth Monarchist use of and reliance on women's visionary experience is indicated by Rogers in both *Ohel* and *Sagrir*. For in these texts Rogers acknowledges his debt to Hildegard and the "many holy women" whose writings had helped him develop his own theological beliefs, and he also acknowledges the spiritual comfort he had received from Anna Trapnel during his imprisonment. Rogers' knowledge of medieval women's mystical texts shows that the huge cultural and temporal differences were not merely surmountable, they were appreciated as proof that the fruits of such mystical learning could to some extent eclipse such differences as those between Catholic and Protestant. In themselves the similarities of women's mystical experience and discourse in the High to Late Middle Ages and in the mid-seventeenth century point towards a tradition of female expression through mysticism, but the evidence of a cross-over of ideas in the printed examples of medieval mysticism extant in the seventeenth century certainly reinforces this. In turn, the identification of a tradition clarifies the power of their mystical learning and discourse.

If Fifth Monarchists like John Rogers were influenced and aided by medieval women mystics like Hildegard and St. Bridget, the implications for the women writers of this movement are enormous. An awareness of a female tradition of visionary experience indicates the presence and the power of the female voice, thereby denoting the sexual difference that is so crucial to Irigaray's scheme. By glorifying the human body through illness, fasting, tears and silence, through their experience of union with Christ, and the fervent images of Christ's Passion, the Fifth Monarchist women mystics reproduced the experiences and aims of the women mystics who wrote from the High to Late Middle Ages.

In *A Legacy for Saints* Anna Trapnel declared that her "desire" was "to leave the Saints a Legacy of experiences".¹ Her aim was to communicate her feelings and beliefs not only in her lifetime, but after death. Trapnel chose her words carefully, and by 'legacy' she meant just that. Insisting on the supremacy of direct mystical knowledge, Trapnel knew the value of her mystical experience and relationship with 'God' and left the written results of it as her bequest. Indeed there is evidence to suggest that Anna Trapnel's influence extended into the eighteenth century since some of her verses from *The Cry of a Stone* were included in a two-hundred page volume of poetry entitled *Poems* (1781). This volume was reprinted in 1791 as *Letters to the Lady Wharton and several other persons of distinction*. Trapnel's name also crops up in *A dissertation on the existence of nature, and extent of the prophetic powers in the human mind* (1794). Trapnel is therefore placed firmly in a tradition of exceptional women who recorded their mystical experience and who remained influential in the centuries following their deaths. Trapnel's conscious decision to participate in a mystical tradition demonstrates the impact of that tradition on the Fifth Monarchy women writers. Thus we can speak of a female mystical tradition which is epitomised by such figures as Hildegard of Bingen, St. Bridget, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Sarah Wight, and Anna Trapnel.

NOTES

- 1 Anna Trapnel, *A Legacy for Saints* (1654) Wing T2032, TT 806(1), p.12.

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